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# Preface

On the evening of what Google tells me was 29 November 1969, which I do remember was the coldest night of the year, my friend Malcolm Wright and I left school in York to get the train to Wakefield to hear the Duke Ellington Orchestra. For a 17-year-old who had got into jazz a few years earlier, this was a pretty special occasion, and 50 or so years later, I can still remember a lot of the concert. What stood out for me then, and still does now, was hearing alto saxophonist Johnny Hodges play, as he had done many times before, 'Things Ain't What They Used To Be', a blues lasting not much more than 3 minutes (you can hear a recorded version from the same tour on YouTube if you look for 'Duke Ellington's 70th Birthday Concert'). It is no exaggeration to say that this was a life-changing experience: the power and intensity of Hodges' sound and line, especially in the last chorus, and the rhythm of the band, did not just change how I saw jazz and music more generally, but helped set in train an enduring involvement with the saxophone, both as player and as listener. As I have come to realize over the years, such an experience and the involvement it led to has considerable philosophical significance. Asked to say what this significance is, I have no simple answer, and this is part of what this book is about. The aim is not to come up with a philosophical explanation of such significance, though some aspects of what I will say move in this direction. My concern is rather with the implications of why Hodges' performance and the responses it provoked, along with other decisive encounters with art, such as reading Proust and Kafka, made sense of the world for me in ways philosophical theories often do not.

In December 1975 I was able at the last minute to get a ticket to hear Herbert von Karajan conducting the Berlin Philharmonic in Bruckner's 8th Symphony. As a result of this performance, the final movement coda of the 8th has taken on iconic significance for me. However often I listen to the symphony, the final coda never seems to lose the power it revealed at that live concert. It also gives rise to changing reflections on how best to perform it, which depends not least on how it is related in performance to the preceding 80 or so minutes of music. Should the coda, as Furtwängler performs it, be a rather rushed and desperate apotheosis, or should it, as some others perform it, be a monumental climactic affirmation which inexorably leads to the final

major-key descending phrase? Why does this matter at all? In one respect, it just does: once one becomes involved with something like this, the world gains a new aspect of sense that justifies itself, and this has something important to do with aesthetics as a whole. Unravelling why the coda is so powerful might take in such factors as the tradition of Western tonal music which involved—in particular via Beethoven's 5th Symphony—the realization of just how powerful the move from minor to major tonality could be in the right contexts, the development of the use of thematic material that carries across symphonic movements, so creating new forms of long-term coherence, the need for new symbolic forms of transcendence generated by modern processes of secularization, and so on. One would also need to take account of my life history and how such factors in music history connect to the ways in which I experience and inhabit the world.

In both the examples cited here, a vital factor is that, even though the explanations might well go on indefinitely, and give rise to possibly irresolvable differences over how to assess them, the initial occasion of the explanations cannot really be put in question, except by claiming that I have been deluding myself for around 50 years. Now I may have been doing this, and people can indeed spend inordinate amounts of time devoted to things that actually don't matter. However, the effects of such experiences on the conduct of my life cannot be conjured away, so their meaningfulness is in one sense indubitably real. For reductive physicalist philosophy, on the other hand, the musical experiences themselves could be said to be illusory, in that, for this philosophy, what was *really* happening consisted in acoustic events, bodily stimulations, brain events, and the like, not in the sense they made to me by changing my relationship to the world.

The fact that this latter sense, rather than the objectified scientific account of its necessary physical conditions, seems to me *philosophically* decisive is one of the main assumptions in what follows. How can the reductive account even seek to analyse a phenomenon like 'performance of Bruckner's 8th', without presupposing at least some level of understanding of what that *is* which cannot be derived from physicalist premises? Epistemological stances of the kind that play a role in much Western philosophy, which can seek to put my experience in the realm of delusion, have no grip in the approach to be developed here. At issue is how the world manifests itself in different ways, engendering differing kinds of active response, rather than being just an object of cognition. One thing that attention to the kind of phenomena in question here shows is that unless the world is already manifest as a locus of concern and understanding, sceptical doubts about whether we can truly

know it make no sense. This points to an issue that recurs in what follows, namely how growth of attention to aesthetic issues in the modern period tends to occur around the same time as the growth of concern with epistemological scepticism. What this suggests is that scepticism, which may often be merely an abstract concern of philosophers, can also be an indication of problems in how humankind relates to the world which are manifest in art in ways that can concern almost everybody.

I should underline that nothing I have to say seeks to question the results of well-warranted natural science. My concern is with how the natural sciences are to be understood in relation to all the ways in which we inhabit the world. This is why crucial questions for philosophical thinking about science often have to do with the limits on how far the human world can be explained by theories which are so unquestionably successful in explaining and manipulating the non-human world.

A book which, as this one does, moves from Montaigne to contemporary philosophy clearly necessitates massive omissions. Detailing these would in itself require a lot of space, and special pleading, so I will leave the reader to fill in the gaps they see. I make no claim at all to have dealt adequately with the relevant secondary literature: had I done so, I would never have got the book written (for quite a few of the topics, my other published work engages with more of the secondary literature). The texts dealt with have been chosen because they establish a series of related themes which seem to me to coalesce into a picture that can affect our perception of the tasks and nature of contemporary philosophy. Some, especially among analytical philosophers, will find the critical side of this picture a distortion or caricature: only time will tell how mistaken my picture is, given that any attempt to draw wider conclusions risks such distortion. It does, though, seem to me time for academic philosophy to reflect on its role in public discourse, when so many ruling assumptions are being called into question by the disintegration of the economic and political order that dominated the world from the 1970s onwards, and by the implications of the climate crisis and, as I write this, the Covid-19 pandemic. This is not in any way to say that specialized domains of philosophy have no value, but rather to suggest that when so much else in the world is being put into question, reflection on what effect such thinking may have on the world can be in order. Both philosophy and art are resources for making sense, and can each be used to question the other, but acknowledgement of art's capacity to do this is too often missing in some areas of philosophy.

Much of what interests me in this book has been affected by involvement with music in particular. Although the music world can suffer from the same

social pathologies as the academic world, my experience in the jazz scene in Cambridge and elsewhere is that it generally involves wonderful people, united by a sense of the value of making music that goes well beyond just the music itself. The members of my jazz quartet (which is a kind of collective), which has played at the Tram Depot pub in Cambridge throughout the period of the writing of the book, have been indispensable companions: Mike Anscombe, John Evans, Laurence Evans, Martin Hallmark, Jon Halton, Joel Humann, Giulio Lampronti, Ben Pringle, Bert Schilperoort, and others underlined the vital function of participation in understanding the philosophical role of art. Thanks also to John Dearn and Joey Mcgillvary for keeping faith with the Sunday evening jazz and running a great pub, and to Adelaide Carpenter for being the perfect audience member for many years. The musicians and audience who come to the Riverside Jazz Jam have helped in underlining the vital social role of involvement in artistic practice. Kevin Flanagan and Sam Miles challenged me to think more about how to play the sax, and gave me regular lessons in this on gigs and in conversations. James Tartaglia's Jazz/Phi project with Mike Green, Timek Jozwiak, Steve Tromans, and myself sought to perform some of the consequences of regarding philosophy as a life-practice that affects and is affected by its means of transmission. My colleagues Neil Gascoigne and Rebecca Roache were astute and entertaining interlocutors. John O'Brien read what I say about Montaigne and offered invaluable criticisms. My PhD students (and undergraduates) were vital to the development of the book, in particular (apologies to those not mentioned by name: you all helped): Jonathan Gray and Philip Mills, who sharpened my sense of key issues concerning language; Jonathan Lewis, with whom the idea for the book came up during a lively PhD supervision; Sam Matthews, who made me finally read Cassirer properly and whose PhD helped me get clear on some vital issues; Fumi Okiji, who made the connection of what I was doing to jazz much more apparent; Erin Plunkett, who made me read Montaigne and think even more about the nature of form in philosophy. Nick Adams, Liz Bradbury, Peter Dews, Manfred Frank, Alex Hampton, Ferdia Stone-Davis, the late Albrecht Wellmer, and many, many others over the years contributed to what I have tried to say. Apologies to those not mentioned by name, particularly the many friends on Facebook, who know how to use it for discussion of things that matter.

My very special thanks go to the Leverhulme Foundation, who, for the second time, made an otherwise unfeasible project possible by awarding me a Major Research Fellowship. The Leverhulme Foundation's preparedness to support large-scale, cross-disciplinary work and to administer the process thoroughly, but without unnecessary obstacles, seems exemplary to me.

# Introduction

One of the striking features of the work of two of the most significant twentieth-century philosophers, Martin Heidegger and Ludwig Wittgenstein, is that questions concerning art and the understanding of art are central to their philosophy. The questions are not confined to a specific domain within their thinking, such as reflections on the 'philosophy of art' or 'aesthetics', but are instead inseparable from their philosophy as a whole. This fact is, though, noticeably at odds with much of the reception of the work of Wittgenstein, where the role of art has often been seen as at best a secondary issue. The ideas of the early Wittgenstein are one of the key sources of analytical approaches to philosophy which still tend to dominate academic philosophy in the English-speaking world. In those approaches aesthetics and the philosophy of art play a minor role, which often does not include reflection—of a kind vital even to the early Wittgenstein—upon whether art may itself be philosophically significant, rather than just being an object of philosophical inquiry.

The chief analytical concern with respect to art is its conceptual status. Establishing this status is attempted, for example, by differentiating aesthetic from non-aesthetic 'properties', or by clarifying the ontological status of a 'work of art', as opposed to something which is not art. The present book wants, in contrast, to consider what happens if we look at key aspects of modern philosophy itself in terms of the idea that issues and forms of expression broadly thought of as 'aesthetic', rather than being peripheral to the concerns of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, philosophy of language and the like, actually have crucial implications for those concerns. The meanings of the term 'aesthetic' are best understood by the way in which they emerge in specific historical contexts, but it is as well to have a preliminary sense of what it can cover. What these aspects of 'aesthetics' have in common is a concern with how historically shifting relations between subject and object are constituted—which, as we will see in Chapter 5, comes to have a lot to do with political economy—and how the relations are articulated and expressed. The 'aesthetic', then, has to do with: sense-perception (from the original Greek meaning of *aisthánesthai*); conceptions of 'art' in general; the specific arts; how aspects, for

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example, of music, like rhythm and tone, are part of other forms of expression; the making of new sense, or what Heidegger terms 'world-disclosure'; the connection of apparently distinct domains of experience and thinking; the apprehension of the world in terms of beauty and intrinsic value; the formal aspects of apparently non-aesthetic modes of articulation, like philosophical writing, that can change the sense of such articulation. In the broadest sense, then, the aesthetic has to do with non-cognitive, non-theological forms of meaning and meaningfulness.

The shifting relationships between the senses of 'aesthetic' are central to what the book wants to explore. Kant, for instance, reorients his approach to the term between the First and the Third Critiques, moving from the aesthetic being restricted to the theory of perception to it being concerned with natural and artistic beauty. He does this for reasons which go beyond a concern with definitions, because the shift in the scope of the term reflects a shift in the scope of philosophical inquiry itself. The legitimation for my approach to illuminating key terms can only be provided by what the book as a whole has to say, but it is important to suggest some of the motivation behind the approach at the outset.

One way of doing this is to ask questions about the contemporary status of philosophy itself. Here one is faced with the fact that what 'philosophy' is understood to be in differing academic, political, and social contexts is hugely contested. It is not that people lack interesting ways of characterizing what they see as proper to philosophy; but these ideas either tend towards the incommensurable, because they approach even apparently shared issues in such divergent ways, or can only be brought under the same heading by eliding crucial differences. Even attempting to explain the divergence in terms, say, of the analytical concentration on the production of arguments addressing issues of metaphysics, epistemology, etc., as opposed to the hermeneutic insistence on understanding what philosophical issues mean in terms of their historical and social contexts of emergence and development, can actually intensify the divergence.

If I were now to offer my own characterization of philosophy I would just be adding a further manifestation of the problem itself. It is therefore more useful here to take on board the instability of the notion of philosophy by thinking of it in terms of how its 'other' is conceived. Two obvious candidates for this are art and natural science. Contrasting philosophy with art and science may, though, also seem just to add to the dilemma, because the boundaries of these are as contentious as those of philosophy. The history of the status of psychology can suggest why, and with respect to art one hardly needs even

to outline the problem, especially since the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century. But now consider the fact that at key moments in its history, philosophy was regarded as coextensive both with art and with natural science. In 1800 Schelling talks, for example, of art as the 'organ of philosophy', and Newton and others called what they were engaged in 'natural philosophy', the term 'natural science' only becoming the norm in the later 19th century. Some contemporary naturalist philosophers, and metaphysicians, think that what they are doing has a scientific status that is a product of the rigour of their arguments. The status of such assumptions need not concern us for the moment: what really interests me is how the field of philosophy is constituted by what it is seen as including or as excluding. By considering how philosophy's identity shifts historically, one can gain insight into the exploration of the changing kinds of sense which are the focus of philosophical reflection. The alternative to such an approach is to assume that there is something which constitutes the essential task of philosophy, such as the search for the truth. However, as Heidegger argues, if the essence of philosophy is the pursuit of the truth, that still leaves the issue of the essence of truth unresolved, and it is not fortuitous that he will himself come to see art as vital to understanding that essence.

At key moments of the emergence of modern philosophy in the eighteenth century, and at crucial junctures in the interim, questions associated with aesthetic reflection play a role in attempts to respond to core philosophical issues. This is famously the case in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790), where the strict division between the 'spontaneous' organizing capacity of the mind, on the one hand, and on the other the effects of the world on the mind in 'receptivity', which Kant relies on for his epistemology, is put in question. The change occurs because Kant realizes the deeper significance of non-cognitive relations to the world, such as those involved in the appreciation of natural beauty, or the production and reception of art. The implications of issues associated with the aesthetic, I want to argue, go to the heart of modern philosophy.

One reason for this is suggested by Max Weber's notion of the 'disenchantment' that ensues from the growth of reliable scientific knowledge, which undermines mythological and theological forms of sense-making. The new attention to the role of the subject in how the world is constituted that is characteristic of Descartes, Kant, and their successors arises at much the same time, both as modern scientific experimental methods and as a separate discipline concerned with the subject's appreciation of the beauty of nature, and art. Aesthetics emerges along with a broader sense of the intrinsic, rather

than the theological, value of the natural world, and with the increasing commodification and exploitation of that world. The question is how we understand these new developments and their implications for subsequent philosophy. Part of the aim of the book is to show that we need to reassess the significance of these changes in the light of historical and political developments which have brought new questions about nature and value to the fore.

A decisive phenomenon here is that the focus of so much philosophy on epistemology and sceptical doubt characteristic of the modern period is the accompaniment to a massive and ever-increasing growth of reliable scientific knowledge (see Dewey 2012). The success of the latter is, however, in striking contrast to the failure of the former to arrive anywhere definitive. It is this contrast which points to the issues that I want to link to the aesthetic dimensions of philosophy.

The least reflective response here is that of the more extreme versions of naturalist reductionism, which assume that in the long run philosophy will be obviated by the natural sciences—an idea already present in some of the attacks on 'metaphysics' of the Vienna Circle. The fact that the attempt to ground scientific knowledge in epistemological terms generates irreconcilable stances is here seen as evidence of the mistaken orientation of epistemology itself, which is to be replaced by explanatory theories of the kind encountered in some versions of neuroscience. However, if one looks at this issue in historical terms, a very different interpretation can be suggested. At the moment, around the middle of the nineteenth century, when scientific advances make it clear that many problems which have been historical threats to human self-preservation will be resolved by the employment of technology, a suspicion of belief in scientific progress emerges in tandem with an aesthetic modernism which sees 'bourgeois' society as shallow and unable really to grasp the problems of making sense of human life in modernity (see Pippin 2012).

The shift of focus here from epistemology to history may appear to change the subject, and so fail to establish a clear perspective on the issues; but this objection is symptomatic of precisely the questions I shall be dealing with. The desire to preserve analytical clarity, by restricting the scope of questions to a specifiable domain, is vital to many aspects of successful natural science, and plays an important role in philosophy. However, unless one assumes that such success is based on something that has to be the basis of all kinds of inquiry and expression, it cannot be the case that questions about the nature and significance of science must all have scientific answers or be answered in ways which try to emulate scientific theories. An assessment of the constellation of increasing scientific certainty based on the predictive and technological

successes of the sciences, and an accompanying philosophical obsession with the attempt to ground that certainty epistemologically, requires more than a focus based solely on cognitive justifications. Why are cognitive and technological success accompanied in philosophy by a sense that the ground of that success is constitutively elusive? In the face of the overwhelming evidence of the success of the sciences, it is tempting just to dismiss the sceptical questions as a quirk of philosophers that can safely be ignored, as they are anyway by most people. However, if one does not regard the history of modern philosophy as merely a history of egregious mistakes, but sees it rather as an expression of tensions in forms of self-understanding in modernity, a different picture emerges (see Dewey 2012; Bowie 2013).

Consider the other constellation suggested above. For Kant, questions about objectivity come to be seen as dependent on subjectivity—precisely in response to Hume's sceptical reflections. This change is linked to a new concern with non-cognitive relationships—most obviously affective ones, but not just these, as the idea of respect for nature can suggest—to the natural world in aesthetics, as well as to fundamental changes, both in the relationship of humankind to nature and in the production and reception of the arts. Questions about the kind of sense made by the natural sciences become manifest here by their contrast with concern about the post-theological foundation of ethical justification, new kinds of sense in art, and the new aesthetic apprehension of the increasingly disenchanted natural world. The separation of cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic spheres that Habermas sees as essential to modernity can be regarded both as a methodological foundation of modern forms of legitimacy and as a manifestation of tensions between the ways in which sense is made in the light of the decline of theology. The demarcation of these spheres is essentially contested, rather than something unproblematically given. Sceptical questions can here be seen as part of a wider awareness that the relationship between subjective and objective has shifted in ways which may not all be explicable in conceptual terms, and so will require other forms of articulation and expression. It is only if the philosophical focus is predominantly on what, in a world without theological foundations, grounds true knowledge claims that epistemological scepticism need be seen as the key issue. If what I am terming the aesthetic dimensions are considered, a richer picture of modernity's self-reflection can emerge.

If scepticism has to do with disruptions in the relationships between ourselves and the world, it seems apt to see it as part of a wider series of disruptions that involve more than cognitive relationships, as the work of Dewey and of Stanley Cavell (1976) suggests. What does it mean to say that all our

beliefs about the world may be false, when we live in a world where we rely on endless complex warranted beliefs and background knowledge for the functioning of our lives? In the perspective that interests me, the prior question is not: 'How can we give an account of how our thought is in touch with/represents/corresponds to/mirrors reality?', which calls for an agreed epistemological answer that we are still waiting for, but rather: 'Why is it a characteristic of the modern period that many philosophers focus on how to ensure philosophy guarantees that our thought has objective purport, when the sciences give good reasons for suggesting our access to reality conceived of as a system of natural laws, and as what we manipulate and alter for our purposes, can be made increasingly reliable?' This question opens up issues in a whole range of disciplines that need not be couched in epistemological terms. That the result here will not be a theory of the kind that is sought in epistemology is precisely what should lead to the revaluation of aesthetic responses to our self-understanding and to our relations to the world, and so to a different image of the tasks of philosophy.

The temptation in this context is often to reduce the issue of sceptical doubt to being a 'psychological' one, but this does not grasp the real nature of the issues, not least because reflection on the scope of psychology involves precisely the issues I am associating with the 'aesthetic'. Psychology itself manifests the tensions involved in divisions between the cultural and the natural. These tensions impinge practically on medicine, social policy, and many other domains of human life.

Part of what I want to show, then, is that many conceptions of the aims of philosophy can, if questions in aesthetics are taken into consideration, be shown to obscure other vital issues. To take an obvious example, the nature of much Anglo-American philosophy is determined by the proposing of arguments for particular positions. This is the case even though the positive nature of the assertions via which this takes place contrasts sharply with the fact that philosophical arguments are acknowledged by many of those who work in this tradition as never being definitive. In one sense, then, the arguments actually lack the positive force that is inherent in the assertion form. The early German Romantics, Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis, already saw this issue in terms of 'irony', the form of assertion which negates its content even as it asserts it. Attempting to speak the truth involves something absolute, but laying claim to something absolute engenders the sense that one constitutively fails to achieve it (see Bowie 1997; 2003; 2013, and below, Frank 1997). Irony for the early Romantics is manifest above all in the fact that interpretation of works of art cannot be definitive, because that contradicts the very nature of

art. For something to be art, it must give rise to ever new reflections, which make new kinds of sense in changing contexts. The very *failure* of each particular understanding to be definitive therefore involves a transcending of the finite elements of which art consists. We don't best understand great music by definitively explaining everything about it—its greatness lies in its remaining alive for those who listen to and play it—and even music that was once significant may cease to be great if it no longer generates new sense.

The core of early Romantic philosophy is the combination of awareness of our inherent finitude with the desire yet to find some way of transcending finitude. In the history of metaphysics, transcendence has sometimes been associated with the notionally absolute status of mathematics. As we shall see, Heidegger and others see this status as questionable. Only by excluding the world outside of mathematics can it have absolute status attributed to it, insofar as 'absolute' means that which cannot be relative to something else. When the role of mathematics in the human world comes into the equation, thus putting mathematics in relation to something else, things become more problematic. The very fact that mathematics has a specific kind of history, as Cassirer, Husserl, Heidegger, Jacob Klein, and others show, is vital here. Much modern philosophy strives after the rigour that is undoubtedly present within mathematics, but this tends to distort the ways in which philosophy deals with topics which cannot be understood with methods that rely on mathematical forms of explanation. The basic point is that mathematics itself does not explain mathematics, in the same way as Heidegger insists there is no 'physics of physics'. Without a world which already makes sense in ways that cannot be made sense of in terms of physics or maths, physics and maths themselves make no sense.

The consequences of the ways of thinking at issue here cannot be overestimated. The consigning of judgement associated with aesthetic issues to the 'merely subjective' is prevalent in many areas, and it is phenomena like this which help reveal how significant the perspective I want to develop may be. If aesthetic sense is seen as merely subjective, because it lacks the certainty present in mathematical and logical judgements, it may be excluded from how we conceive of rationality. This exclusion has effects on how culture is administered and supported, in areas such as education, the arts, or the use of public space. How, then, can we understand the sense that makes aesthetics so important, in ways which do not merely relegate it to the arbitrarily subjective, but also do not seek to give it the same objective status as warranted scientific claims? This question is a version of the one which Kant addresses in the

Third Critique, but its ramifications and the nature of the question differ in differing historical contexts, a fact that will be crucial to what I have to say.

The approach here will, however, involve more than a defence of the specific validity of aesthetic judgements, of the kind brilliantly mapped out by Stanley Cavell in 'Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy' (Cavell 1976: ch. 8). I also want to suggest that the ways in which aesthetic issues emerge in modern philosophy are crucial to our understanding of the very status of philosophy. The sense that is germane to the aesthetic dimensions of philosophy can, precisely because it is not primarily cognitive, affect the priorities of philosophical understanding. The epistemological focus of so much modern philosophy has often been characterized in terms of the aim of establishing how the world is to be accurately represented. Richard Rorty's questioning of this approach in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* began a decisive change in some areas of Anglo-American philosophy. Despite its pragmatist orientation, however, Rorty's work can take too little account of the diversity of alternative ways of making sense of the world. This is because it suggests that aesthetic ways of understanding and forms of expression belong in the 'private' sphere, in contrast with the 'public' nature of scientific and political claims. The way Rorty makes this contrast can sometimes lend support to some of the kinds of philosophy which the perspective offered here wants to question.

My contention is that the line between participatory and observational forms of sense-making is not the same as the line between private and public. If philosophy is seen as the search for answers to certain foundational questions, and the answers are assumed to be articulable as theoretical claims, many of the forms in which people actually make sense of the world can be neglected. Such forms can involve participating in forms of expression and creation, from rituals, religious or non-religious, to making things, making music, actually doing philosophy, etc., that are not adequately articulated in theoretical form, because the meaning inheres in the doing itself and its consequences. These forms of sense-making involve demands for what can be seen in terms of truth and validity, but the kinds of truth and validity in question need not take a form which can be fully captured by theoretical or other propositional claims. 'Getting it right' in music, for example, is not best thought of as corresponding to a pre-existing standard, or established goal, because it often involves the disclosure of something new, so establishing a space in which things make sense which previously did not. The performance history of Beethoven's symphonies involves changes in the realization of the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, timbral and instrumental elements of the symphonies that can all cast light on what the symphonies are understood to be

'saying'. If one takes seriously the sense associated with aesthetic artefacts and practices, the fact that no definitive consensus emerges as to how the symphonies are best performed is not a testimony to mere arbitrariness. More radically, jazz pianist Thelonious Monk's injunction, when someone maintained what a musician played was 'wrong', that 'Wrong is right' indicates how, very often, changes in artistic possibilities depend on doing what is seen as wrong in a way which makes it right. The medieval 'diabolus in musica', the 'tritone', is used in modern jazz to swap a dominant chord to the chord a tritone away (f#7 for c7), and this becomes the basis of large parts of modern jazz vocabulary.

Traditional conceptions of metaphysics work with the idea of pre-existing truth as their goal of inquiry. The alternative at issue here can accept the idea of such a goal with respect to the world as described in terms of mathematical laws. Dewey suggests that the idea of a completed system of nature is, though, a projection of a particular assumption about the timeless truth of mathematics onto nature, so 'attributing all qualities inconsistent with nature thus defined to "finite" mind, in order to account for ignorance, doubt, error and the need of inference and inquiry' (Dewey 1958: 160). Once the inherent temporality of the concrete results of that inquiry—results which change the nature and conduct of human life—is incorporated into philosophical reflection, the significance of shifting understandings of the world, rather than the assumed timeless constitution of nature, becomes manifest, and this is what makes the aesthetic dimensions so important.

If maths is one form in which modern philosophy seeks transcendence, the other form, as various varieties of Romanticism and aestheticism suggest, is art. The contrast between these two forms of transcendence is echoed in aspects of the contrast between analytical and European approaches to philosophy.[1] This is evident in the often radically differing understandings of language that have predominated in these approaches. The tradition deriving from Bolzano and Frege takes logical forms that relate to mathematics as a key to analysing meaning, whereas the hermeneutic tradition sees understanding as a kind of art, because it cannot be adequately explained in terms of the application of rules, and is inextricably linked to other, non-mathematizable human practices. In the many contemporary ways of doing philosophy, the response

[1] In some respects this difference is an artificial construct, as many philosophers do not fit easily into either category. At the same time, institutionalized philosophy demonstrably involves tensions between two notional traditions. Differing attitudes towards the significance of the sciences and of the arts for philosophy can often be mapped onto differences between analytical and European approaches, and this will be significant in what follows.

to this divide is to seek arguments justifying whatever approach to meaning is adopted, so excluding the alternative approach. Such arguments, which are evidently often illuminating (see, in particular, Wellmer 2004, who gives good reasons for taking both traditions seriously), can, however, obscure significant issues. What tends to be neglected is the emergence in modernity of the divide between mathematically oriented and culturally oriented approaches itself. Reflection on the emergence of the divide may sometimes afford greater insight into philosophy's concern with transcendence than specific arguments advanced in the competing traditions.

At issue here are conflicting ways of construing the development of modernity. The realization of the potential involved in what Husserl, in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, terms the 'mathematization of the cosmos', that is adumbrated in Descartes, accompanies the emergence of modern versions of the sceptical problematic. In turn, the naturalization of conceptions of language, which begins in earnest with the questioning of language's divine origin by Herder and others, is accompanied by the beginning both of modern philosophical aesthetics and of the change in the perception of nature evident in Kant's turning his attention to natural beauty as a response to questions in his epistemology.

The further key factor here is the emergence of modern capitalism, which brings about the rapid transformation of the social, cultural, and political fabric of Europe, and then the rest of the world. This, crucially, involves another aspect of mathematization, namely the massive increase in the monetizing and quantification of social forms of production and exchange, phenomena Marx associates with 'alienation'. The sceptical position is, as we saw, unexpected, given that it emerges in conjunction with the rise of increasingly reliable science. What is at issue here is, then, not a primarily epistemological concern about what justifies knowledge, but rather a more complex and diverse sense of dislocation. Such a conception makes the link of aesthetics to the focus of modern philosophy easier to comprehend, because the forms of sense involved in natural beauty and art can involve an albeit fragile resistance to the quantifying and objectifying approaches to the world which are part of what generates the dislocation. The question is what philosophical status is given to such forms, and how those forms relate to other forms of sense-making.

The core developments here can be approached in terms of concerns which rarely make any serious appearance in epistemological reflection, notably issues to do with economics and the wider question of the constitution of value. (Value has begun to play a new role in epistemology, but generally not

in the sense intended here.) This focus on economics may seem surprising, given the book's focus on aesthetic matters. Accounts of how the doubts relating to scepticism arise can just focus on existential and psychological manifestations of unease in relation to the world that arises out of the decline of feudal structures of belief and action, where 'all that is solid melts into air' (Marx 2017: loc. 25072). The precise nature of the doubts will depend, though, on which story is told of their origin, and it is here that economic issues can be important.

For the moment I just want to propose a rough framework, which will later be differentiated and filled out via consideration of aspects of the aesthetic dimensions of modern philosophy. The increased reliability of scientific claims is in part a product of an analytical focus on specific phenomena that seeks to exclude extraneous factors from what is to be understood, and to order the phenomena in mathematical terms. This analytical approach generates the potential for arriving at laws which account for phenomena in warrantable ways. It also, however, generates notorious problems with regard to inductive inferences: what decides which are the observed factors that are relevant?

Consider now the fact that the rapidly growing systematization of knowledge claims based on empirical data and mathematical judgement is contemporaneous with the beginnings of a systematic constitution of the economic world, as the new role of money and markets change the face, initially of the Western world, and then of the whole world (see Polanyi 2001; Graeber 2011; and Chapter 5). Stephen Gaukroger suggests what is different in modern Western science: 'The "Scientific Revolution" of the early-modern West breaks with the boom/bust pattern of all other scientific cultures, and what emerges is the uninterrupted and cumulative growth that constitutes the general rule for scientific development in the West since that time' (Gaukroger 2006: 18). Something related occurs in the sphere of commodity exchange, which expands to cover the whole world. In another respect, though, the illumination of the workings of the natural world by the sciences—where the sense of a potentially infinite expansion comes to inform perceptions of the scientific enterprise (see Deutsch 2011), despite empirical obstacles to cognitive progress and concerns about transgressing God-given limits—contrasts starkly with what happens in the socioeconomic world. Here the experience is frequently one of disruption, disorientation, and bafflement about what is actually happening. An analytical focus on, for example, circumscribed aspects of the working of the new economic forms that begin to develop in the seventeenth century can lead to chaos and new reasons for warfare,

because changing one part of the whole has massive unforeseen effects on the rest (see Polanyi 2001). Without a view which seeks to connect apparently disparate phenomena into some kind of totality, any hope of orientation is lost, but the ground of such a synthetic view proves to be elusive.

The forms the disorientation takes are, moreover, themselves far from straightforward. Rather than seeing the emergence of modern scepticism just as part of the development of a specifically philosophical story, one can link it to changes in forms of exchange, and thence to changes in aesthetic forms which seek to come to terms with new kinds of disruption of received meanings and values. In *The Theory of the Novel* Georg Lukács, for example, sees the rise of the novel as the manifestation of 'transcendental homelessness', and *Don Quixote*, which plays with the fluidity of reality in the face of subjective projection, is contemporaneous with Descartes' search for the *fundamentum inconcussum* in the subject that sets the agenda for so much modern philosophy. The novel in its modern form that develops in the seventeenth century (see Bakhtin 1982 for an alternative, but related conception) is itself concerned from the outset with how new forms of economic exchange alter the formation of individual identity, posing questions about the nature of self-knowledge which connect to the sceptical problematic. Similarly, Shakespeare's concern with 'dissembling' and with doubts about knowledge of other people's real nature suggest how understanding the world demands new forms that incorporate the kinds of experience and personality development brought about by increases in social mobility.

In *The Origin of the German Play of Mourning*, Walter Benjamin considers the role of allegory in Baroque theatre and Shakespeare: 'Every person, every thing, every relationship can arbitrarily mean something else. This possibility passes a devastating but just judgement on the profane world: it is characterised as a world in which details are not strictly that important' (Benjamin 1980: *GS* I.1, 350). Benjamin's hopes for an escape from the arbitrariness of the signifier into a 'language of names' which restores an essential connection between word and thing are illusory, but his way of characterizing modernity can offer an interpretative frame that allows for the widening of philosophical perspective beyond epistemological scepticism that I am interested in here. What is at issue is a thoroughgoing 'de-essentialization' of the world, which, to use Hilary Putnam's phrase, ceases to be 'ready-made'. This claim is, of course, a feature of many interpretations of modernity. The main point is precisely how one tells the story of the dissolution of essentialism, given that some parts of modern philosophy are still devoted to restoring it in the form of a version of metaphysics that finds out 'what fundamental kinds of things

there are' (Williamson 2017: 19). Even if that were to prove to be a viable enterprise, it would not obviate the fact that the doubts about essence characteristic of early modernity inaugurate what Adorno thinks of in terms of 'nature history'. What nature *is* ceases to be pre-given and has, in some still endlessly disputed manner, to be established. The ways in which nature in modernity is constituted are therefore not contingent add-ons to what it metaphysically 'really is', because what nature is now also depends on its relationship to history. This is apparent in the changing status of natural beauty in the eighteenth century, where nature can become a resource in relation to the destruction of other forms of meaning by the sciences, and by the effects of the commodity form on the very sense of what objects are.

What the aesthetic dimensions can be seen as contesting is the idea that 'nature' stays the same because it is essentially a system of necessary, unchanging laws discoverable by the new sciences. To take an example that we will consider again later, in *The Great Transformation* Karl Polanyi suggests of the crucial changes which characterize modern capitalism that 'labor, land, and money are obviously *not* commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue with regard to them' (Polanyi 2001: 75). Under the influence of the 'commodity fiction' that turns them into commodities, labour, land (which, as Polanyi says, is just 'nature'), and money become something wholly different from what they had previously been. To maintain that nature is really just the same as before the transformation requires an objectification that renders it difficult, if not impossible, to understand why one result of the transformation will be the ecological crisis with which we are now faced.

The obvious rejoinder here is that the sense of 'nature' in each case is different, so that two things are being conflated. But this kind of conceptual clarification can empty history of its substance, because it fails to investigate the dynamic whereby concepts change their nature. Such a dynamic is holistic, so analysis of an isolated concept, like 'nature', is not adequate to how the concept gains its substance via its changing relationships to other concepts and via changes in the world. The ecological crisis was already foretold by thinkers at the end of the eighteenth century, like Schelling, for whom nature was not just the system of necessary laws, and could be damaged by being wholly subjected to human purposes (see Bowie 1993). However, ecological thinking only becomes something substantial much later, even though the intellectual resources for it can be said to develop along with new aesthetic forms of relationship to nature at the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the basis of these forms, as we will see, actually begins to emerge in certain aspects of

early modern Christian thinkers, like Michel de Montaigne. Had nature been widely manifest much earlier as what it is in ecological terms, the contemporary crisis would not have taken the form it does.

One way to frame the issues here, which makes it clear why the economic dimension is crucial, is in terms of the idea of transformations of value. If there is a transcendent source of value, all other ways in which values are manifested are marked by relativity, and can be open to suspicion, as the critical attitude towards money in many religions makes clear. David Graeber (2011) argues that human history is in decisive respects constituted in terms of debt, thus of the ways in which people's identity is defined by the value that they owe to others. How such value is constituted determines core aspects of the cultural life of a society, and modernity raises the question of how values are to be grounded, once the assumption of their having a transcendent source is put in question. In modern aesthetics, a dimension of human relationships to the world becomes significant whose value is often seen as self-legitimating because it has no immediate instrumental purpose. Generalizing assertions like this are questionable, but more detailed examination of the historical changes in evaluation can make them more plausible. Such changes may come about through individual initiative in presenting new arguments, or through finding ways of expressing a new vision of value, but they can also be the result of objective pressures which render previous evaluations meaningless, and which give force to new arguments and forms of expression. It is the latter which is crucial for modernity. When objective pressures proliferate, their effects on conceptions of value become greater, and people's orientation with respect to values can come into crisis.

The ways in which value is manifested should not just be thought of in terms of judgements, beliefs, claims, etc., because value is often realized by participation in practices which cannot always be articulated in propositional or other verbal forms. The issue of judgement, often in the guise of discussion of 'taste', is one of the key aspects in understanding the emergence of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics. The rise of the idea of the self-determining subject, which accompanies the disintegration of feudalism, leads to the sense that what subjects value can no longer be understood in terms of an order that transcends them. Value therefore becomes inherently contested, as the still widespread assumption that it is 'subjective' makes clear. The main aesthetic problem is how non-cognitive evaluations are to be grounded, given their dependence on the individual subject who finds something pleasurable or not. In this way, aesthetic judgements are separated from cognitive judgements, and the idea of modernity as defined by the

differentiation of cognitive, ethical/legal, and aesthetic spheres is used to investigate how the different domains of modernity interact. However, such a view, which has undoubted explanatory power, tends to underplay the ways in which these notional domains affect each other, and so to render the borders between them less obvious than they may first appear.

One way of suggesting an alternative here is to consider how the pleasure of the individual subject is to be understood. Viewed from a 'Cartesian' standpoint, the experience of pleasure in aesthetic apprehension is something inwardly undergone by each individual, and so is irreducibly personal. Scepticism about aesthetic judgements can then be seen to parallel scepticism about cognitive judgements: in both cases there is a gap between subjective and objective. However, a 'Cartesian' approach is already implausible in relation to aesthetic production, where the subject is inherently engaged in something 'objective' because of the resistance of the material being worked on, be it words, sounds, paint, stone, etc. The very sense of 'objective' is ambiguous: it need not refer to what is true. As the German word *Gegenstand*, with its connotation of 'standing against', suggests, what is 'objective' can equally have to do with what 'stands against' or resists us in other than cognitive respects, and therefore involves some kind of action. Even with respect just to aesthetic reception, what occasions pleasure is evidently not just inward and individual. It depends on the cultural pressures on, and opportunities afforded to, the subject in a particular social context, which enable or hinder the formation of the capacity for evaluation of pleasure. These cultural potentials have a history which is in many respects objectively reconstructable: dissonance in music is, for example, often initially rejected, before becoming a new expressive resource that can give rise to new forms of pleasure and engagement with sound. The value of dissonance in modern music is linked precisely to its ability to express more of subjective life, but the need to extend the resources to do this is generated by objective historical and social tensions. The fact that a piece like Alban Berg's *Three Pieces for Orchestra* (1913–15) uses dissonance in ways which can seem like an expression of the disintegration and violence associated with the First World War suggests what is meant here.

The emergence of aesthetics and the rapid changes in art in modernity have, then, precisely to do with how the relationships between subjective and objective manifest themselves in ways that are inseparable from historical changes in humankind's relationship to the natural world. The relationships can be seen in terms of how the subject can accurately represent the objective world, but the very instability of attempts to show how this is possible points to what is revealed by consideration of aesthetic matters. The instability

evident in the epistemological enterprise cannot itself be assessed solely in epistemological terms, for lack of a position from which to do so. Such a position would itself have to depend on a successful outcome of epistemological reflection. What is needed, then, are other ways of articulating and expressing the content of the recurrent epistemological crises that characterize the development of modern philosophy. These ways form the crux of what I will have to say.

Given the somewhat unusual trajectory of what follows, it is worth giving a preliminary summary of each chapter here:

Chapter 1 examines contrasting ways in which modern notions of the subject emerge in the work of Montaigne, Descartes, and Hume, as a way of establishing the space in which concern with aesthetic dimensions comes about. A new focus on the self is linked to differing conceptions of sceptical doubt, because the relationship between I and world is put in question by political, sociocultural, and economic changes. In Montaigne, the form of his text plays a substantial role in its content, creating a shifting vision that is akin to what happens in a novel. Rather than, as Descartes does, seeking to establish a firm foundation for knowledge, Montaigne uses the shifting form of his writing to warn against claims to certainty. The division between Descartes's epistemological response to doubt and Montaigne's aesthetically constructed and religiously oriented response is one manifestation of a series of philosophical divisions that recur in modernity. The complexity of responses to the subject–object relationship is then illustrated by Hume's reflections on 'taste'. Despite his sceptical epistemological reflections, Hume insists on the durability of significant art in the face of historical change. This suggests a philosophical perspective based on the centrality of human values and of the non-cognitive sense we make of the world. Questions about the foundations of value are crucial to how the aesthetic dimensions relate to the effects of modern capitalism on humankind's relationship to nature.

Chapter 2 looks at how a division develops in the eighteenth century between objectifying relationships to nature, both in the modern natural sciences and in the increasing commodification of nature by capital, and new, non-theological views of nature which see it as a resource for meaning. Nature is here both a law-bound mechanical system that can be exploited for human ends and something with intrinsic value. The friction between these two views leads to the development of the philosophical discipline of aesthetics. Judgement is essential to both sides of this tension, and Kant tries to make sense of us as beings who judge cognitively, ethically, and aesthetically. The divisions between these kinds of judgement are not absolute, and this points

to new ways of understanding both internal and external nature. The emergence of non-theological theories of the origins of language adds a further dimension to this. Language comes to be seen as a 'natural' phenomenon, which also makes it possible for human beings to make sense of nature. In both art and language, what connects the subject to the world depends on a non-objectified sense of 'nature' that contrasts with the mechanical conception.

Chapter 3 considers how these changes lead to art being seen by some thinkers as a superior form of philosophy. The concern of both German Idealist and early Romantic philosophy is with how to overcome the split between mind and nature they see as opened up by Kant's critical philosophy. In the early Romantics, the 'absolute' that would comprehend the relationship of mind and world is not accessible to conceptual thinking, and this leads in the direction of art as the expression of the absolute. In Hegel, by contrast, art is inferior to philosophy, because it depends on particularity. The absolute is inherent instead in philosophy's explication of thought as the negation of particularity. Even after he has completed his system, however, Hegel continues to revisit aesthetic issues. This raises the question of how sense is constituted when science disenchants traditional means of making sense, and leads to the threat of 'nihilism'. This, rather than scepticism about the justification of knowledge, is the key philosophical issue. For the early Romantics, the fact that works of art cannot be definitively interpreted means that their genesis of new sense is more important than the idea of any final philosophical truth. Hegel turns the sceptical approach against itself by arguing that truth is actually generated by the process of refutation, and this is the highest philosophical insight. His position can, though, be questioned by asking why, if art is superseded by philosophy, artistic forms remain crucial to how people respond to the modern world.

Chapter 4 looks at how the emergence of sustained philosophical attention to art relates to new conceptions of language in the eighteenth century and beyond. Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* is used to show how links between language and art develop. 'Designative' (Taylor 2016) conceptions of language see it primarily in terms of the representation of pre-existing 'independent objects', and so as connected to mathematics and natural scientific explanation. If language is instead seen as constituting an intelligible world before issues involving the justification of knowledge can arise at all, designative conceptions become questionable. 'Constitutive' conceptions, in contrast, are linked to human expressive activity, and thus to art, and are not primarily 'representational'. Language can here be seen as related to music and the other arts, which situate us in the world. When modern forms of quantification and

objectification come to dominate, the aesthetic dimension can be regarded as the location from which to question the effects of this domination. The emergence of modern hermeneutics is also connected to seeing language in relation to art. An absence of definitive explanations of meaning in the Romantic conceptions of language is not seen in sceptical terms, and instead forms the basis of their view of literature as of value precisely because it is 'not exhausted by any theory' (Schlegel 1988: vol. ii, p. 115), and offers the perennial possibility of making new sense.

Chapter 5 looks at how the rise of aesthetic concerns in modernity is bound up with shifts in the relationship between subjective and objective that are linked to political economy and the effects of the modern sciences. The early Nietzsche argues that art is the only thing that can give sense to human existence in the face of the disenchantment inherent in modern science. The relationship of the change in the nature of objects resulting from the 'market mechanism' to modern philosophical anxieties with respect to the nature of value is then explored via Karl Polanyi's account of the 'Great Transformation' occasioned by the industrial revolution. Value comes to function differently with the change brought about by the 'market mechanism' that founds modern capitalism, where objects become commodities and can lose intrinsic or cultural value. This process accompanies the growing technological success of the mathematically based modern sciences, which undermine mythological and theological forms of meaning. Ideas about the 'end of philosophy' emerge in the nineteenth century because of the potential for metaphysics to be a means of obscuring rather than revealing the nature of reality. This is a sign of a more general sense that received forms of value can be linked to repression, which plays a major role in the work of the later Nietzsche. The emergence in this period of a concern with the autonomous value of art relates to the sense that something is lacking in modern humankind's relationship to the world that previously was provided by theology. Marx and others think in terms of capitalism's 'reification' of the relations between human beings, and both the natural world and other human beings. As a result, objectifying, systematic ways of ordering the world can add to the failure to make sense of what is really happening. Nietzsche associates the critique of metaphysics as hiding the real nature of things both with his particular form of naturalism and with art, though he largely ignores the economic effects of the great transformation on how value functions in modern life.

Chapter 6 looks at the importance of art in the work of Martin Heidegger, which relates to his investigation of how philosophy should understand the modern sciences. The core issue is again not epistemological scepticism, but

the idea that 'Western metaphysics' lacks the capacity to make sense of what is really happening in the world. The role of art in Heidegger derives precisely from his rejection of what underlies many accounts of epistemological doubt. Were there no always already existing forms of sense inherent in our inhabiting the world, the question as to whether cognitive forms correspond to reality could not even be asked. These prior forms are what makes art important in relation to philosophy. Art arises in the conflict between making things manifest and intelligible and the resistance of things to becoming manifest. Truth in art relates to the way meaning is generated in human practices that first make theoretical truths possible at all. Heidegger also questions the idea of language as being primarily 'designative' or 'representational', and this connects to the questioning of objectification considered in the earlier chapters. Like Nietzsche, though, Heidegger fails to take adequate account of the socio-economic factors that give rise to the objectifying processes which make art crucial to new ways of grasping the pathologies of modernity.

Chapter 7 focuses on Adorno, who does give a decisive role to political economy in understanding both the disasters of modern history and why art matters as a response to these disasters. Adorno argues that forms of identification, from concepts to the commodity form, can lead to repression. He uses the notion of 'non-identity' to understand how art articulates the particularity that other forms can obscure. 'Aesthetic truth' is inherent in the social role of art: debates about aesthetic quality would make no sense if the participants regarded such quality as just subjective preference. Art involves 'mimesis', which depends on 'impulse, the immediacy of experience', rather than conceptuality, and it can connect us to nature in non-repressive ways. Adorno sees the impulse to domination of the objective world as the core of modern subjectivity. In engaging with art, the subject can, though, question its distorted relationships to the world. The catastrophes of modern history lead to the point where art enacts a refusal to make sense, in order not to conspire with what leads to the horrors. Adorno's sometimes extreme interpretations of aesthetic modernism tend to underestimate the value of participation in art as a means of extending communicative possibilities. At the same time, much production of art is undoubtedly subject to the mechanisms of the market, and this justifies key aspects of his approach.

The Conclusion considers implications of academic philosophy's tendency to underplay the forms of sense-making associated with art. A predominant focus on argument can lead to a failure to see how the illumination philosophy can provide comes about, which often has to do with the aesthetic dimensions. Dewey stresses the different ways in which 'commerce with the world'

involves self and world in ways which make no sense if one assumes a sceptical division between the two, and he sees the aesthetic dimensions as indispensable. What music 'says', for example, cannot be adequately articulated by philosophy. Merleau-Ponty speaks of philosophy 'giving form to the world' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: xiii).

This suggests how seeing art as a kind of philosophy, and philosophy as a kind of art, can allow us to appreciate unresolved tensions between the different cultural domains of the modern world, and can question the frequently scientistic direction taken by philosophy. Habermas talks in this respect of taking 'domains of experience seriously that first have to be disclosed performatively through participation in a practice'. The real-world contribution of this reorientation of the focus of philosophy lies in its highlighting alternative ways of making sense that are repressed by technocratic imperatives.

I have dealt with parts of the material of some of the chapters in previous publications, but the aim here is to synthesize the issues into a more substantial story that offers an overall picture of an alternative approach to philosophy. I hope that this also makes clearer than I may have previously managed to do what the import of this particular story is for issues beyond the practice of philosophy itself.

# 1
# Grounding the Subject

## Changing the Subject

The emergence of aesthetics as a specific form of philosophical reflection in eighteenth-century Europe is inseparable from the emergence of a new concern with subjectivity (see Bowie 2003). Furthermore, a modern notion of 'art' itself, which gives art a specific kind of 'autonomy', only really comes into existence with aesthetics. These changes are related to the rise of individualism associated with the emergence of Western capitalism. Before the nature of the subject's relationship to the world became central to philosophy, 'art' was generally linked to notions of 'representation' and 'mimesis', to forms of religious ritual or celebration, and to forms of social activity like dining and dancing. These do not inherently involve reflection, either on the subject that represents and imitates or upon how art can reveal the world in new ways. It is when certain kinds of dislocation between subject and world develop that art in the senses that concern us here becomes central to philosophical reflection, and adds a vital new dimension to such reflection.

Statements of this level of generality may seem questionable, but a refusal to countenance the idea of profound historical shifts in the way humankind relates to, understands, and articulates the world of which it is a part makes it impossible to investigate how forms of thought and action that determine the contemporary world came into being. The difficulty here is apparent, though, in how one frames a narrative of such changes: just presenting a series of changing philosophical arguments that are proposed in the relevant periods excludes too much of what matters here. Isolating arguments from the practices which form their context can obscure how they relate to the world in which they emerge. That relationship is often best approached by seeing philosophical arguments, not just in terms of their claims to validity, but as forms of sense-making that have to be understood by their connection to other such forms, which include what I am referring to as the aesthetic dimensions.

I want first to outline a contrast between two early modern manifestations of concern with the subject. In the perspective of many histories of philosophy René Descartes (1596–1650) plays a decisive role in how modernity

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relates to subjectivity. Indeed, Heidegger makes Descartes's new focus on the subject a crucial factor in his characterization of modernity as the 'subjectification of being' by modern science and technology. Michel de Montaigne (1533–92), on the other hand, does not figure so often as a major focus of philosophical attention in such histories, despite his influence on Descartes, and on the modern exploration of subjectivity and of scepticism. Both Montaigne and Descartes pose questions about the foundations of knowledge that are characteristic of the concern with scepticism, but their responses are paradigmatically different. What is at issue here is not primarily the validity of the arguments and assertions of the respective writers—Montaigne himself warns against overvaluing argument and assertion—but rather the way they manifest in differing ways a modern sense that something fundamental has changed in how humankind relates to the world. Heidegger gives reasons for being wary of philosophical conceptions based on the notion of a subject/object split. However, if we accept that the relationship between the two is not to be definitively established by an epistemological theory of how mind relates to world, exploration of historical tensions between shifting configurations of 'subjective' and 'objective', e.g. of the kind found in Adorno (see Bowie 2013), can be an important source of insight.

## Montaigne and the Meanings of Scepticism

Scepticism need not be construed primarily in terms of putting in doubt the certainty of knowledge by epistemological reflection. Important parts of the sceptical tradition focus on the dangers of putative certainty, while still accepting the need for 'holding as true'. This already points to an aspect of what I intend by considering the aesthetic dimensions. Knowledge need have no inherent primacy in philosophy, even though, to judge by the history of modern philosophy, it is frequently seen as doing so. Part of the reason for questioning the primacy afforded to knowledge is that what knowledge *is* cannot be just assumed to be the same in differing periods. Stephen Gaukroger points out: 'One of the most distinctive features of the emergence of a scientific culture in modern Europe is the gradual assimilation of all cognitive values to scientific ones' (Gaukroger 2006: 11), which suggests how the practice of science affects the very notion of what knowledge is. What is true in certain domains is atemporal, in the sense that it is captured by laws of regularity (as suggested by Dewey's remarks on mathematical knowledge of natural laws cited in the Introduction). However, an adequate understanding of knowledge

is not furnished by reducing it, for example, to statements of warranted belief, which, if true, are always true. Even the contrast between 'knowing that' and 'knowing how' suggests this. More fundamentally, how a culture or a historical period relates to what it regards as knowledge can tell us about how to understand that culture or period in ways that just looking at what was held as true do not. Dewey remarks that 'the work of knowledge in a given social culture faces two ways. It concerns what a community esteems in the way of knowledge and the order of value in which it prizes different modes or kinds of knowledge' (Dewey 2012: loc. 2200).

In his Introduction to Sextus Empiricus' *Outlines of Scepticism*, Jonathan Barnes offers one rather too sweeping view of why Sextus' form of sceptical thinking became important for thinkers like Montaigne (a lot depends on just how 'metaphysics' is conceived):

> In the modern period, epistemology took over the role of metaphysics, and an inquiry into the nature and basis of human knowledge came to be regarded as the primary part of philosophy: first determine what we can speak of, and then speak about it. Why the change from metaphysics to epistemology? No doubt there were numerous reasons, but one among them was the rediscovery of Sextus. (Annas and Barnes 2000: xi)

The rediscovery of Sextus can be linked to wider shifts in conceptions of and relationships to nature in the early modern period. Barnes points out that Sextus may not have been the originator of many of the ideas in his texts, and Montaigne's thoughts are themselves often built around a scaffolding of quotations and ideas borrowed from thinkers like Sextus. Currents of thought propagate in ways which cannot always be attached to the arguments of individuals, and have to be seen as part of the world in which they occur. Moreover, adequate understanding of what is at issue demands attention to other dimensions than the supposed substance of sceptical arguments. In Montaigne's case this already becomes apparent in the fact that the 'literary' dimension of his texts is fundamental to their content. His stances on many issues change, moving from Stoical, to sceptical, and other takes on core matters, such that the *Essays* are inconsistent on many philosophical questions. At the same time—and this is one way of regarding their status as 'literary' text—the inconsistency is not a manifestation of incoherence. It is rather a means of articulating a complex, moving vision, in which the dynamic of the shifts in the text is an essential part of what they mean, rather as the sense of music lies more in the way it moves and less in the identifiable elements of which it consists.

The contradictions in Montaigne emerge from his revolutionary initiation of the task of exploring his world via an exploration of himself, which reveals a fundamental contingency: 'I cannot remain fixed within my disposition and endowments. Chance plays a greater part in all this than I do. […] where I seek myself I cannot find myself: I discover myself more by accident than by inquiring into my judgement' (Montaigne 2003: 39–40, loc. 1767). A key perspective emerges if one looks at how 'nature' appears in relation to Montaigne's self-interpretations. One recurrent theme is of a loss of contact with nature, of a kind he claims 'primitive' peoples had, and children or animals still have—namely a being at home with things in a non-reflective manner:

> Nature, being equal and common to all, cannot fail to be just. But since we have unslaved ourselves from Nature's law and given ourselves over to the vagrant liberty of our mental perceptions, the least we can do is to help ourselves by making them incline towards the most agreeable direction.
>
> (Montaigne 2003: 60, loc. 2106)

More emphatically:

> We have abandoned Nature and want to teach her own lessons to her who used to guide us so happily and surely. And yet such traces of her teachings and whatever little of her image remain by favour of ignorance stamped on the life of that crowd of uncultured country-folk, Erudition is compelled to go and beg from them, day in, day out, in order to supply patterns of constancy, simplicity and tranquillity for its own pupils.
>
> (Montaigne 2003: 1188, loc. 22046)

What people now think of as 'natural' to them is actually the product of custom and habit whose origins have been forgotten, or of which they were not aware.

The invocation of a 'nature' that has been lost can be a very questionable idea, but historical context is vital to how we interpret it. The point here is Montaigne's insistence on the need for everyday patterns of sense, of a kind that knowledge alone cannot provide, that enable people to live tolerable lives. Indeed, knowledge can even disrupt such patterns in ways that make less sense of life. The little monk in Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, who fears what Galileo's removing the earth from the centre of the universe would do to the assumptions about the meaningfulness of the world of his poor, rural parents, exemplifies the problem. The loss of such patterns generates the need for a replacement,

and this cannot, given the issues raised by sceptical reflection, be achieved just by knowing more. What lies behind such a need will help to generate the modern concern with aesthetic issues of the kind that I want to explore. The generation and exploration of aesthetic forms of sense can be precisely a counterbalance to the effects of new forms of knowledge on how people make sense.

Montaigne is writing when the shape of a new social order that will incorporate the individualism characteristic of emerging modernity is being contested. He lives through a time of civil unrest where life is, even by the standards of the era, very precarious indeed. Max Horkheimer contends that Montaigne's scepticism 'is the exact opposite of the destruction as which it sometimes appears to its supporters and opponents. It is essentially conservative' (Horkheimer 1938: 8). The conservatism does not involve seeking the continuation of the old order, but wants rather to sustain potential for the private individual to inhabit a world in which sense can be made, if only social order can be maintained. That Montaigne would adopt a sceptical attitude towards much of the knowledge of his time is hardly surprising with respect to such areas as medical knowledge, and he is wary both of the way knowledge can be damaging—'Knowledge is a dangerous sword; in a weak hand which does not know how to wield it it gets in its master's way and wounds him' (Montaigne 2003: 158, loc. 3777)—and of any absolute claims to knowledge.

One key to the emergence of the aesthetic dimensions in modernity is the concern with the formation of judgement in face of the growing diversity of what we seek to know, which Montaigne looks at in his reflections on education:

> This great world of ours (which for some is only one species within a generic group) is the looking-glass in which we must gaze to come to know ourselves from the right slant. […] Such a variety of humours, schools of thought, opinions, laws and customs teach us to judge sanely of our own and teach our judgement to acknowledge its shortcomings and natural weakness.
>
> (Montaigne 2003: 177, loc. 4122)

The important aspect here is the combination of the centrality of judgement with the acknowledgement of its inherent fallibility. Montaigne's fallibilism has a theological basis, the disintegration of which in subsequent modern philosophy will fuel the concern with epistemological foundations that contrasts with Montaigne's conservative sceptical stance:

> reason has taught me that, if you condemn in this way anything whatever as definitely false and quite impossible, you are claiming to know the frontiers and bounds of the will of God and the power of Nature our Mother; it taught me also that there is nothing in the whole world madder than bringing matters down to the measure of our own capacities and potentialities.
>
> (Montaigne 2003: 201, loc. 4558)

By rejecting a Protagorean relativism with the standard arguments ('if all truths are relative, so is this one', etc.), Montaigne raises the question of how the universalism attached to the notion of truth—'The essence of Truth is to be constant and uniform' (2003: 622, loc. 12,007)—can be achieved, given the limits of reason. His aim is a proper awareness of the dangers of thinking that we know what we don't, which means that the most important kind of judgement suspends being definitive:

> Faults can often escape our vigilance: sickness of judgement consists in not perceiving them when they are revealed to us. Knowledge and truth can lodge within us without judgement; judgement can do so without them: indeed, recognizing our ignorance is one of the surest and most beautiful witnesses to our judgement that I can find. (Montaigne 2003: 458, loc. 8950)

The forms that awareness of ignorance takes are central to the aesthetic dimensions of modern philosophy.

A derivative of this stance will, for example, play a role in the early German Romantic valorization of art because of its resistance to definitive interpretation. Rather than the highest knowledge being something that can be asserted, it involves for Montaigne a way of remaining aware of our cognitive limits: 'To determine the limits of our powers and to know and judge the difficulty of anything whatsoever constitutes great, even the highest, knowledge' (2003: 560, loc. 10,849). Montaigne's claim points forward in one respect to Kant's focus on establishing the limits of knowledge as a means for determining what we may justifiably assert, in order to avoid unsustainable metaphysical commitments. It can also, in the context of Montaigne's more mundane assertions, be understood in pragmatic terms. He suggests: 'truth itself is not privileged to be used all the time and in all circumstances: noble though its employment is, it has its limits and boundaries' (2003: 1223, loc. 22,657). We have to seek answers to cognitive, ethical, and other dilemmas, but the scope of our answers is not contained in a philosophical expression of a dilemma, and depends instead on judging how the philosophical expression relates to

the complexity of specific real world cases, as well as on judging which expression is apt to the case in point. Kant's idea of 'reflective' judgement, which moves from contingent particulars to general rules without there being a rule for the move, and is crucial to his reflections on the role of aesthetics in philosophy, will echo this issue.

Montaigne, then, is not making a philosophical attempt to draw the limits and boundaries of truth. Instead, he wants to show that it is only through experience in real cases that we can make our judgement more reliable: what such experience contains will necessarily involve contingency. His approach in fact leads more in the direction of the novel, the genre which is developing into its modern form around his time, than of philosophy. Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the novel's 'polyphonic' form, in which competing voices reveal the complexity of how we are to judge the truth in a world where grounded theological certainties are disappearing, suggests why. Cervantes' portrayal, in *Don Quixote*, of how the individual imagination can resist the pressures of a mundane reality and coopt others into a fictional alternative world that in some ways makes more sense than the mundane one, suggests other dimensions of the response to the erosion of theological grounds for belief.

Montaigne derives his philosophical views in this area from aspects of Plato and of the sceptical tradition, so they are nothing radically new. When he says the following, which might seem to be characteristically 'modern', the ideas are actually cited from Greek philosophy:

> To conclude: there is no permanent existence either in our being or in that of objects. We ourselves, our faculty of judgement and all mortal things are flowing and rolling ceaselessly: nothing certain can be established about one from the other, since both judged and judging are ever shifting and changing. (Montaigne 2003: 679, loc. 13046)

The modernity of Montaigne's vision results rather from the new *form* in which it is articulated, namely the accumulation of *essais*, 'attempts' at self-analysis through engagement with his world, whose conflicting elements constitute a new way of responding to the world (see Plunkett 2018). This is a result of the fact that the world to which his work is a response is itself changing, and so changes the significance of sceptical ideas.

In this respect the claim that 'both judged and judging are ever shifting and changing' takes on a new significance because it is *enacted* in a new way, in which the text itself is constituted from stories, arguments, everyday examples, quotations, etc., which are given a form that would not be found in earlier

texts. Montaigne retains a faith in a God-given order of things: 'our concepts and thoughts […] have a body of sorts, but it is a formless mass, unenlightened and without shape, unless accompanied by faith in God and by grace' (2003: 498, loc. 9693), and 'there can be no first principles unless God has revealed them; all the rest—beginning, middle and end—is dream and vapour' (607, loc. 11,718). The apparent sense of an alienated relationship between humankind and the world in many of his remarks is therefore alleviated by faith in a transcendent ground which becomes manifest precisely via awareness of fallibility:

> Our religion did not come to us through reasoned arguments or from our own intelligence: it came to us from outside authority, by commandments. That being so, weakness of judgement helps us more than strength; blindness, more than clarity of vision. We become learned in God's wisdom more by ignorance than by knowledge. (2003: 557)

It will be precisely the rapid growth of warrantable, technologically useable knowledge from the seventeenth century onwards that changes such a picture, because the source of meaning can no longer be assumed to lie in the revelation of human fallibility in the face of a divinity who is the ground of truth. The question then becomes how truth can be grounded in philosophy, and how to respond if such grounding does not succeed.

If we look at Montaigne in terms of the notional validity of his sceptical arguments, he is of little significance in relation to much more differentiated contemporary arguments with respect to scepticism (e.g. Stroud 1984; see Gascoigne 2014 for a more historically aware account). Such scepticism is, though, often one-dimensionally epistemological in a basically Cartesian manner—'what guarantees that I am not dreaming/hallucinating?'—too often missing the other dimensions of ancient and early modern scepticism. Does this mean that we therefore just read Montaigne's text as part of the 'history of philosophy' or the 'history of ideas'? The distinction between the two tends (for an elaborated view, see Rorty, Schneewind, and Skinner 1984) to be in terms of whether the substance of the text can contribute to contemporary debate about 'philosophical problems', or whether we see ideas as elements of a certain kind of 'antiquarian' history of conceptual monuments from the past. The problem with both approaches is that they fail to articulate why the text remains 'alive' in ways which neither its supposed philosophical content nor its place in a historical context can adequately account for. The reason has to do with the fact that Montaigne's texts disclose a world which does not emerge via a consistent underlying view, or a series of arguments, or the

psychology of the author, etc. Indeed, it is precisely the contradictions and inconsistencies between the multitude of perspectives that make Montaigne's text 'alive', even though many of its arguments and its theological pieties belong to the past.

Such a judgement is essentially an 'aesthetic' one: in the face of what in philosophy can be construed as lacking grounded certainty and logical consistency, the response is not to seek a way of establishing grounded truth. Instead it is to see how, through seeking an appropriate form for their expression, contradiction and a sceptical attitude can actually illuminate the world, rather than resulting in a sense of crisis and alienation. However, Montaigne also has the potential to suggest coming crises, which the philosophical responses to be examined later attempt to resolve. His influence on Pascal, and the latter's impact on key strands of thought that are critical of aspects of the Enlightenment in J.G. Hamann and F.H. Jacobi relate, as we shall see, to the fact that Montaigne questions the idea of an ultimate rational ground for philosophy. Indeed, Jacobi will fear that without faith the lack of a ground leads to the 'abyss', and attempts to overcome Jacobi's fear play an important role in Schelling, Hegel, and others. It is, then, precisely the tradition which explores responses to the lack of ultimate grounds that often sees art and aesthetics as a central aspect of philosophical reflection.

## Descartes: Scepticism and the Quest for Certainty

The paradigmatic contrast with Montaigne's theologically based acceptance of the ultimate groundlessness of human beliefs is encountered in Descartes's *Meditations* and *Search for a Method*. Whereas Montaigne, in the light of the actual science of his time, has considerable justification for regarding scientific knowledge as inherently suspect, Descartes's realization of the potential for mathematical methods to generate new, reliable knowledge means that faith in science begins to have some justification. At the same time, he sets in train the modern focus on the idea that, whatever successes the sciences may achieve, they are in need of a philosophical grounding—a grounding which turns out, though, to be elusive. It is this elusiveness that I want to connect to aesthetics, which, rather than seeking to establish a stable subject–object relationship that can ground knowledge, responds to the shifting ways in which subjective and objective relate.

Many interpretations tend to coopt Descartes into the ongoing debate about epistemological scepticism, based on the assumption of a separation of

mind and world, and mind and body, while taking too little account of the fact that the subject–world relationship in Descartes involves other important factors. These connect to the paradox of growing scientific reliability generating deep sceptical anxieties. The combination of a new understanding of how mathematics gives rise to endless new cognitive and technological possibilities with a sense of the fragility of the human location within the world is anything but solely a cognitive matter.

Descartes's sceptical reflections follow from the emergence of modern scientific method, which puts the wisdom of the Bible and the Greeks into doubt by showing that many received explanations of natural phenomena are untenable. However, although Descartes has the new mathematically based scientific advances in mind, his resolutions with respect to establishing the truth do not immediately follow from them:

> The first [resolution] was never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such; that is to say, carefully to avoid precipitancy and prejudice, and to comprise nothing more in my judgement than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly as to exclude all ground of doubt. (Descartes n.d.: 13)

Throughout, Descartes is concerned to sustain a radical separation between 'thinking', where he regards the certainty of what is clear and distinct as given, and what comes to us from perception, which is inherently unreliable.

This separation leads to radical doubt:

> seeing that our senses sometimes deceive us, I was willing to suppose that there existed nothing really such as they presented to us; and because some men err in reasoning, and fall into paralogisms, even on the simplest matters of geometry, I, convinced that I was as open to error as any other, rejected as false all the reasonings I had hitherto taken for demonstrations; and finally, when I considered that the very same thoughts (presentations) which we experience when awake may also be experienced when we are asleep, while there is at that time not one of them true, I supposed that all the objects (presentations) that had ever entered into my mind when awake, had in them no more truth than the illusions of my dreams. (Descartes n.d.: 22)

Famously, even to think this, the thinker who doubts must exist, hence 'I think, therefore I am' (p. 22). Consequently, '"I", that is to say, the mind by which I am what I am, is wholly distinct from the body, and is even more

easily known than the latter, and is such, that although the latter were not, it would still continue to be all that it is' (p. 23), whence 'I readily discover that there is nothing more easily or clearly apprehended than my own mind' (p. 83). Well before Descartes, Augustine had argued that the I is more readily known than the world. Descartes, though, pushes the separation of I and body much further, partly in order to establish 'knowledge of the immortality of the soul' (p. 65), but also in order to build on the a priori certainty of mathematics: 'for whether I am awake or dreaming, it remains true that two and three make five, and that a square has but four sides; nor does it seem possible that truths so apparent can ever fall under a suspicion of falsity or incertitude' (p. 71).

Leaving aside whether such a radical dualism makes any sense at all, the important question is why, at this historical juncture, the senses come to be regarded with suspicion in the particular way they do. Mistrust of perception goes back once again to the Greeks, but something has qualitatively shifted in Descartes. Consider the following:

> Am I so dependent on the body and the senses that without these I cannot exist? But I had the persuasion that there was absolutely nothing in the world, that there was no sky and no earth, neither minds nor bodies; was I not, therefore, at the same time, persuaded that I did not exist? […] this proposition [*pronunciatum*] I am, I exist, is necessarily true each time it is expressed by me, or conceived in my mind. (Descartes n.d.: 76)

Given that such a sense of radical separation between I and world is not an aspect of previous Western philosophy—despite the shared sceptical concerns, and awareness of the potential unreliability of perception, one cannot imagine this in Montaigne—how are we to interpret this change?

One aspect of the change is apparent in Descartes's theological claim: 'And thus I very clearly see that the certitude and truth of all science depends on the knowledge alone of the true God, insomuch that, before I knew him, I could have no perfect knowledge of any other thing' (p. 114). This knowledge also includes 'corporeal nature, in so far as it is the object of pure mathematics which do not consider whether it exists or not' (p. 114). Two aspects combine here: an infinite ground—based on the ontological proof that God's existence follows of necessity from the concept of God—which is devoid of the imperfection of the human relationships to the world, and the a priori necessity of pure mathematics and idealized space. What falls outside the purity of these aspects, though, is devoid of any stability. The sense of 'ontological insecurity'

manifest in the passages in which Descartes strips away any reliance on the perceptible world, where there is 'no sky and no earth', or where he imagines being wholly deceived about the nature of reality, is, then, the dialectical counterpart of the rationalist exclusion of anything to do with the senses in the name of foundational certainty. Part of the significance of the aesthetic dimensions will lie precisely in their ability to articulate how such anxiety may develop, and to find ways of expressively making sense of the instability of the perceptible world, rather than excluding it from the truth.

A further perspective on the change in question here is evident in the fact that Descartes does not actually write a systematic theoretical treatise in the *Discourse* (or the *Meditations*), but rather a narrative in which the theoretical points emerge from an account of his life which in certain respects echoes Montaigne: 'I at length resolved to make myself an object of study, and to employ all the powers of my mind in choosing the paths I ought to follow' (2003: 6). However, the object in question is very different from what it is in Montaigne. As Ernst Cassirer points out in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, there are competing notions of *Geist* (mind/spirit) involved here. The consciousness that tells the self-reflexive narrative, making sense of its doubts and desire for certainty, is reduced to the I of pure thought by the path of Descartes's reflections: 'The universitas of mind, its concrete totality only counts […] as truly comprehended and as philosophically penetrated if it is deduced from a single logical principle. In this way the pure form of logic is again raised to being the prototype and model for all mental [*geistige*] being and every mental form' (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 15). The complexity and richness of the history that leads to the location of a single founding logical principle in the I is occluded by the aim of philosophical purity, although the text in which this principle is asserted is itself not reducible to its own foundational assertion.

John Dewey gives an illuminating account of what is at issue here in *Unmodern and Modern Philosophy*. The medieval view of nature 'has no room for the opposition of subject and object that has been at the bottom of most distinctively "modern" statements of the problem of knowledge' (Dewey 2012: loc. 1969). The new conception based on the search for grounded certainty appears in Dewey's terms to involve 'the moral alienation of man from nature' (loc. 1976). The new science 'did away with the notion of grades of Being (Reality) and of grades in knowledge. The notion of necessary correspondence of the one with the other was then left in its most general and blank form' (loc. 1984). Descartes thereby helps to perpetuate 'the notion that *certainty* is a required character of anything claiming to be knowledge in its full sense: And

this in spite of the fact that the actual practices which yield the most authentic forms of knowledge of the natural world are stated with a *probability* coefficient' (loc. 1991). Epistemology becomes 'framed on the foundation provided by *first truths* as premises', and knowledge becomes identified with 'that which cannot be doubted' (loc. 2046). This idea is, Dewey convincingly argues, at odds with the actual practices and assumptions, not just of modern natural science, but even of modern mathematics. He stresses, then, in Hegelian vein, that '*consequences*, *outcomes*, *conclusions* of inquiry have, with respect to trusted claims to truth, a rank and status incomparably superior to that possessed by antecedents, first and beginning materials' (loc. 2414).

The following, from Keith Thomas's *Man and the Natural World*, suggests how the differences between Montaigne and Descartes are part of a bigger picture:

> For it was between 1500 and 1800 that there occurred a whole cluster of changes in the way in which men and women, at all social levels, perceived and classified the natural world around them. In the process some long-established dogmas about man's place in nature were discarded. New sensibilities arose towards animals, plants and landscape. The relationship of man to other species was redefined; and his right to exploit those species for his own advantage was sharply challenged. It was these centuries which generated both an intense interest in the natural world and those doubts and anxieties about man's relationship to it which we have inherited in magnified form. (Thomas 1983: loc. 224)

Unlike Descartes, Montaigne does not hold 'the view that animals were mere machines or automata, like clocks, capable of complex behaviour, but wholly incapable of speech, reasoning, or, on some interpretations, even sensation' (2003: loc. 593). Instead he stresses (albeit not always in a manner we can now accept) the ways in which animals are closer to us than is compatible with the positive self-image of humankind he seeks to criticize. Whereas Montaigne's sceptical reflections put in question 'man's "imaginary sovereignty" over other creatures' (loc. 3566), Descartes's exclusion of the senses and search for foundational certainty takes place in the name of being 'lord and master of nature', and he regards non-human animals as mere automata. This contrast is crucial for the subsequent development of philosophy. A difference emerges between approaches which seek to align themselves with the sciences by making epistemology central, and those which see a predominantly cognitive relationship to nature as having potentially problematic cultural and

other consequences. The former tend to have little space for aesthetic issues; the latter regard them as vital.

The connection to the aesthetic dimensions can be suggested via Dewey's comment that 'the human aspect of the theory of knowledge has to do with the connections or interactivities that take place between knowledge as one set or system of social events and other sets or systems' (2012: loc. 2719). The issue of our relations to animals has become more central in recent times, and it will clearly not be settled just by arguments in epistemology, even if arguments, say, about the relationship between 'sentience' and 'sapience' play an important role in trying to understand those relations. It is precisely in this space that the aesthetic issues are constituted. Other 'social events' in the context that matter here are precisely the changes in sensibility that accompany the development of the sciences, and how those changes, which are not primarily cognitive, come to be expressed in art.

## The Sense of Value

The concern that develops, notably in the eighteenth century in Britain, with 'taste' indicates by the very meanings of the word what is at issue here. The term 'taste' can be attributed as a property to an object, and can be used to designate a sense that gives rise to pleasure or displeasure in a way that, initially at least, is not in the control of the subject. It can also be used to designate the capacity for discriminations in judgement of beauty, structure, etc., which are analogous to cognitive discriminations, because they can be accepted or rejected, are based on evidence, argument, etc., can be refined, and so can enter the 'space of reasons'. Descartes's radical exclusion of the senses necessarily relegates discriminations of taste to the realm of what is not 'clear and distinct', and this is still echoed in the current trends in philosophy which take natural scientific claims as having essential priority. Discussion of taste in the eighteenth century oscillates between positions which locate beauty in the object of judgements of taste and those which locate it in the subject judging the object, so echoing other modern philosophical divisions between materialism/realism and idealism.

Such divisions are best read in our context as indications of historical changes in how value is founded and legitimated, and of how these shifts are interpreted. Descartes's investment in mathematics as a route to clarity and distinctness, which avoids the errors inherent in sensuous perception, coincides with the rise in Western Europe of a new capitalist society. This relies on

forms of exchange that make quantifiable 'exchange value'—which is indifferent to the sensuous particularity and 'use value' of the object—the condition of possibility of the exchange of empirically different objects and kinds of objects (see Chapter 5). In analogous ways, the 'mathematization of the cosmos' (Husserl) relies for the production of physical laws on the fact that repeatable mathematical symbols can identify materially non-identical particulars, in order to bring them under laws of regularity. This schematic linking of these domains will be filled out and differentiated in what follows, but the exclusion of perceptual aspects of the world both in certain rationalist conceptions of scientific truth and in the functioning of commodity exchange suggests why the notion of 'aesthetics'—whose meaning derives from the Greek *aisthánesthai*, 'perceive sensuously'—might play a significant role in the self-understanding of the modern world. When Alexander Baumgarten initiates the development of the modern notion of 'aesthetics' in his *Aesthetica* (part 1 published in 1750, part 2 in 1758: see Baumgarten 1988), he does so in the name of a revaluation of the particularity of perception, of what 'appears as true', the *Wahrscheinliche*, and of 'extensive clarity', as opposed to Cartesian 'intensive clarity (see Bowie 2003). Aesthetics constitutively avoids the exclusion of perception, while also involving cognitive elements, of the kind that are germane to the natural sciences. It is, as Kant, a pupil of Baumgarten, will make clear (see Chapter 2), the way in which aesthetics is located between these divisions in philosophy that makes it so important.

The role of art and aesthetics in modernity is inseparable from the question of how sense is made of a world whose theological foundations have been undermined. Perception gives rise to foundational problems because its material would seem never to be strictly identical. This is especially the case if that material is conceived of as discrete 'sense data', in the form, say, of photons hitting a retina, or the vibrations of an ear drum which air waves set in motion. For these events to be intelligible as seeing or hearing something in a world, other factors have to come into play: the question is exactly what these are. In the stories which tend to dominate the debate, either things are out there 'ready-made' (which tends to involve an implicit theological underpinning), and perception can come to 're-present' them as whatever they are, or they have to be assembled 'by the mind' (or, these days, the brain) from the raw perceptual data that we receive. Again we end up with versions of materialism/realism versus idealism, with the issues we touched on above, and with the impasses of much modern epistemology.

What is missing here is an adequate understanding of what makes things matter at all in the first place, which again puts in question a predominant

focus on knowledge. As we saw in the Introduction, relationships of humankind to the world involve cultural meanings that can be expressed in ritual, mythological, aesthetic, and other forms: we will consider the accounts of this by Cassirer and others in later chapters. Clearly we can make the world rationally intelligible and manipulable, by establishing identities between elements of, and between events in, the world. This is what makes the new application of mathematics so important for Descartes and for the Western scientific revolution. At the same time, in societies involving commodity markets, the establishing of quantitative identities is, even before the wholesale commodification of the natural and social world in modern capitalism, often regarded with suspicion, because it erodes the particularity of things and damages non-quantifiable forms of human exchange and interaction (see e.g. Graeber 2011, and Chapter 5). The importance of aesthetics in this context lies in its concern with relations to the world which are valuable in ways that are not wholly comprehensible in terms of classification, quantification, and explanation, and are arguably prior to these.

Some of the most influential modern reflections on art, like those of the early German Romantics, will contend that it is precisely art's resistance to dominant forms of identification, evident in the changing and contested interpretations of the most important art, that makes art philosophically significant. In contrast to the philosophical concern with truth exemplified by Descartes's pursuit of 'clear and distinct ideas', aesthetics can therefore be seen as revealing a truth which manifests itself by revealing how sense in the world is never complete. Such truth is inseparable from participation in specific practices. The concern in modernity is, then, with sustaining and developing practices which generate value and sense in the world, when that value comes to be seen as under threat in ways associated with secularization and commodification. In this perspective, the emergence of reflections on scepticism in Montaigne and others indicates a concern with how certain kinds of value are at risk from the currents which underlie the beginnings of modernity. The dislocation from the world discussed above is linked to objective processes in the economy and society that change how subjects value aspects of the world, and so change what is regarded as objective (see Chapter 5).

David Hume, as an eighteenth-century successor to the thinkers concerned with scepticism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, illustrates aspects of where this can lead. Hume famously awakens Kant from his 'dogmatic slumbers' by showing that what we claim to know of the physical universe cannot be said to be pre-given, but depends instead on the contingent information we receive from the world, and on the capacity of the mind to make

habitual links between data that are 'constantly conjoined'. 'Dogmatic' metaphysical claims about the nature of things from a God's eye view are therefore ruled out. However, Hume's scepticism about metaphysics does not entail a wholesale scepticism about natural science, because he regards science as based on what can be built up from experience. The fact that experience is contingent means that the foundationalism present in Descartes is no longer on the agenda, because the only source of the data required by the sciences is precisely the senses. However, accumulated sense-experience does, Hume believes, make increasingly reliable science possible. This kind of empiricism involves the idea that each subject, *qua* locus of sense perceptions, is inherently different from all other such loci. Such a view points in a sceptical direction, because there is no overarching guarantee of what holds the world together, truths about the world being generated by connections between sense-data in separate individuals. It also, though, points towards the need for intersubjective agreement on what can be reliably believed, thus suggesting the threat of social atomization if agreement is not forthcoming. Hume, although at times plagued ontological insecurity occasioned by sceptical doubts, largely thinks such agreement is possible, hence his advocacy of Newton's physics. This much is standard fare in discussion of Hume's role in modern epistemology. Looking at the aesthetic dimension results in something perhaps less familiar.

Lack of agreement resulting from an individualist empiricism is, as we have seen, still routinely assumed to be most evident in people's aesthetic evaluations. But here things turn out not to be so simple. Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste' takes up the issue of the disparity between subjects characteristic of epistemological debate with respect to the evaluation of what is beautiful or pleasing. The disparity, he argues, presupposes an equivalence between such aesthetic evaluations because they are based on 'sentiment' which is internal, and particular to each individual—'no sentiment represents what is really in the object' (Hume n.d.: loc. 54)—and can therefore, for lack of a criterion of objectivity, have no essential priority over any other evaluation. However:

> Whoever would assert an equality of genius and elegance between OGILBY and MILTON, or BUNYAN and ADDISON, would be thought to defend no less an extravagance, than if he had maintained a mole-hill to be as high as Teneriffe, or a pond as extensive as the ocean. Though there may be found persons, who give the preference to the former authors; no one pays attention to such a taste; and we pronounce, without scruple, the sentiment of these pretended critics to be absurd and ridiculous. The principle of the natural equality of tastes is then totally forgot, and while we admit it on some

> occasions, where the objects seem near an equality, it appears an extravagant paradox, or rather a palpable absurdity, where objects so disproportioned are compared together. (Hume n.d.: loc. 62)

Hume goes further later in the text, when he ponders the difficulty of finding the 'standard of taste':

> Though in speculation we may readily avow a certain criterion in science and deny it in sentiment, the matter is found in practice to be much more hard to ascertain in the former case than the latter. Theories of abstract philosophy, systems of profound theology, have prevailed during one age: In a successive period, these have been universally exploded… And nothing has been experienced more liable to the revolutions of chance and fashion than those pretended decisions of science. (Hume n.d.: loc. 238)

Hume uses 'science' in the general sense characteristic of his era here, so it includes metaphysics. He takes Newton's experiment-based, natural scientific methods as his model for inquiry in any area, but that means he sees science in a fallibilist manner, as continually revisable in the light of new empirical evidence.

It is notable that a thinker who carries out one of the most influential early naturalist attacks on metaphysics, and has a mainly pragmatic approach to scientific activity, then also maintains that 'ARISTOTLE, and PLATO, and EPICURUS, and DESCARTES, may successively yield to each other: But TERENCE and VIRGIL maintain an universal, undisputed empire over the minds of men' (Hume n.d.: loc. 246), and that societies may be 'mistaken in the choice of their admired philosopher', but 'they have never been found long to err, in their affection for a favorite epic or tragic author' (loc. 254). Hume sees what is durable in art as depending in part on certain basic moral standards. What is held as true philosophically and the contingencies of social life are so subject to change that we would never appreciate past art if we could not at least imaginatively identify with the 'opinions, which then prevailed, and relish the sentiments or conclusions derived from them' (loc. 302), even though we reject them outside of art. But 'where vicious manners are described' without 'disapprobation', the work of art will suffer in our estimation (loc. 286). Hume is very aware that immediate responses to art will often be flawed, being influenced by contingent psychological and social factors: the influence of 'universal beauty'—he refers to Homer in this context—can therefore be ascertained 'not so much from the operation of each particular

beauty, as from the durable admiration, which attends those works, that have survived all the caprices of mode and fashion, all the mistakes of ignorance and envy' (loc. 98). Much of the rest of Hume's argument is a product of its time, and is of less interest for what I want to explore in the subsequent development of the aesthetic dimensions of philosophy. However, his concern with the durability of art in the face of the mutability of so many aspects of the world, including, of course, philosophy itself, highlights a key issue.

I have framed the exploration of the aesthetic dimensions of philosophy in terms of the differing ways in which sense is made of the world, and have related the concern with scepticism in modern philosophy to a dislocation that emerges, even as scientific knowledge gives rise to ever more technological means for controlling nature. The dislocation is manifested in terms of questions of value: the origins of the idea of a 'fact/value' distinction and the supposed impossibility of deriving the latter from the former lie in Hume's and others' reflections on rationalism and empiricism in the eighteenth century. Differences in aesthetic evaluation are often regarded as testimony to an atomized individualism of values that emerges out of the disintegration of the feudal order, and the idea of the subjectivity of aesthetic judgement rests predominantly on the contrast with judgements about scientific facts. The relative stability of theories to explain such facts in certain domains—Kant also uses Newton's laws of motion as a fundamental point of orientation—justifies their being deemed 'objective'. However, both Hume and Kant are aware that relegating aesthetic judgements to mere 'subjectivity' raises problems, to the point where Hume sees the durability of certain works of art as testifying to a kind of objectivity—because the durability cannot be located in arbitrary subjective responses—which is lacking in the sciences.

The view that validity inheres in the plausibility of the grounds given for a judgement, rather than being necessarily more likely in the scientific domain, is, in the wake of the development of pragmatism, now quite widely supported. Stephen Toulmin says, for example:

> Philosophers have often held that arguments in some fields of inquiry are intrinsically more open to rational assessment that those in others: questions of mathematics and questions about everyday matters of fact, for instance, have been considered to have a certain priority in logic over (say) matters of law, morals or aesthetics, [but] 'there is […] a complete parallelism between arguments in all these different fields, and no grounds are yet evident for according priority to mathematical and similar matters.
>
> (Toulmin 2003: 37).

That such a view has become quite mainstream offers some evidence of its cogency, though it also can indicate the danger of taking philosophy to be exclusively about establishing better arguments. Before what Toulmin's view represents becomes accepted in some quarters, the tensions that are symbolized in it are played out, and continue to be played out in the sociopolitical world.

It would, for example, be difficult to take seriously Weber's idea of disenchantment, and the processes of commodification and bureaucratization, if there were not important conflicts involved in the relationships between different fields of modern culture that are implicit in Toulmin's remark. What occurs is a questioning of major sources of meaning and value in a variety of ways across Europe (see Gaukroger 2006 on the fact that science and religion were in many places by no means simply opposed). This questioning sets in train attempts to establish new kinds of value and orientation which are apparent in the transformations that occur in the arts and in aesthetics.

Perhaps the most obvious way to capture what is at issue here is to suggest that it can be seen as culminating in Nietzsche's questions about the value of scientific truth itself. However, it is notable how distant a lot of thinking about science in Nietzsche's time often was from such questions. Gaukroger cites Beatrice Webb 'reflecting on what she refers to as the "religion of science" of her adolescence in the 1870s'; she defines it as 'an implicit faith that by the methods of physical science, and by these methods alone, could be solved all the problems arising out of the relation of man to man and of man towards the universe' (Gaukroger 2006: 24). Her faith is present at precisely the time when Nietzsche is questioning the equation of scientific with social progress and giving a central philosophical role to what can be understood through art, because science leads in the direction of 'nihilism' (see Chapter 5). In the same discussion Gaukroger cites Joseph Priestley, writing in 1768:

> all knowledge will be subdivided and extended; and knowledge, as Lord Bacon observes, being power, the human powers will, in fact, be increased; nature, including both its materials, and its laws, will be more at our command; men will make their situation in this world abundantly more easy and comfortable; they will probably prolong their existence in it, and will grow daily more happy, each in himself, and more able (and, I believe, more disposed) to communicate happiness to others (ibid. p. 39).
>
> (Cited from Joseph Priestley, *An Essay on the First Principles of Government*, London, 1768)

No hint of scepticism here, and the faith in scientific knowledge is characteristic of a certain Enlightenment temper. However, such visions now appear in the light of a history which gives the lie to an optimistic link between cognitive and civilizational advances, and in which philosophical concern with scepticism keeps re-emerging. Thomas's concern with changes in sensibility cited above is echoed in key aspects of the philosophy that I now wish to look at, beginning with Kant. Here a sophisticated apparatus for understanding vital questions about modernity emerges from what appears initially (and is perhaps still too widely thought of as such) to be an epistemological response to sceptical doubt.

# 2
# The Nature of the Subject

## The Nature of Objectivity

Hume's granting of objectivity to art whose value lies in its durability suggests how the line between subjective and objective is not as straightforward as it is for rationalist philosophy, which grants objectivity only to matters of fact and to mathematics. The tension between 'rationalism' and 'empiricism', which Kant seeks to resolve, is apparent in Descartes's exclusion of the senses from the establishing of certainty, in the name of (the subject's) pure thought, and Hume's contrasting insistence that reliable science can only be achieved through the classification of accumulated data from (the subject's) senses. The split here between conceptions of what makes cognition possible does not need to be read just in terms of epistemology. In a world determined more and more by systems that depend on abstraction from empirical particularity, the subject itself can become in certain respects detached from what makes ordering and control of the world possible. This detachment can then also be connected to a sense of detachment from the world itself, illustrated, for example, by the empiricist claim that we don't experience the world, but what goes on in our perceptual apparatus ('when I touch the table I'm actually feeling my hand').[1] It is also present in the effects of new economic value-forms which can obscure the value of particular things, and of individual people.

Without empirical particularity there is no material to be ordered by pure forms of thought or the commodity form; at the same time, such particularity cannot be understood solely in terms of how it can be cognitively organized or made into exchange value. This is the vital issue in our context. The sense

[1] A more striking, if fictional, example, which connects this issue to the issue of commodification, occurs when Huysmans' Des Esseintes, in ch. 11 of *À Rebours*, calls off a trip to London when he realizes that the experience he sought is fulfilled by an establishment in Paris that provides the smells and tastes he wanted: 'After all, I have felt and seen what I wanted to feel and see. I have been steeped in English life ever since I left home; it would be a fool's trick to go and lose these imperishable impressions by a clumsy change of locality' (Huysmans n.d.: 134).

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the subject makes of the world also depends on relationships to things which engage the subject in ways that cognitive ordering may not, and which may be required for such ordering to make sense at all. It is this situation that leads to concern with the aesthetic dimensions. Things have to matter because of prior engagement with them, if attempts to order them conceptually are to occur. In this respect sceptical questions can be said to lose one part of their grip, because they are preceded by a sense-generating engagement with the world that must be always already in place. Why, otherwise, would scepticism be a worry at all, if there were not some kind of prior sense that is disrupted by it? The objectifying view which pays no attention to this aspect and gives rise to sceptical concerns is, in this perspective, as much the product of historical shifts as a metaphysical issue.

The changes in sensibility explored by Keith Thomas indicate the decisive dialectic in play here. The objectifying forms which enable nature to become increasingly subject to human control also liberate potential for nature to be experienced in ways which are not based on control, and break the limitations imposed by theology. New affective responses that can change what 'nature' is are one major aspect in the changes in sensibility. The assumption here is that what nature is should be seen in terms of the sense it possesses in social, cultural, and historical contexts. Thomas suggests: 'A reader who came fresh to the moral and theological writings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could be forgiven for inferring that their main purpose was to define the special status of man and to justify his rule over other creatures' (Thomas 1983 Loc. 419). By the eighteenth century that special status is increasingly undermined precisely by the growing effectiveness of the manifestations of that rule. New ways of understanding humankind's relationship to nature become both a major scientific and philosophical issue and a focus of many other aspects of European culture, from new forms of depiction of wild nature to mountain-climbing (see MacFarlane 2009), and the aesthetic developments that we will encounter later. This transformation is often seen in terms of a new 'cultivation of sensibility', and as a projection of subjective feelings onto a nature objectively indifferent to that projection—thus as a Romanticism of the 'pathetic fallacy'. Such a view addresses some aspects of what happens in the eighteenth century and after. However, as we have already seen, the change cannot be understood as merely 'subjective', in the sense of an internal, individual occurrence. It occurs as a supra-individual change in differing places during this period, and so, like Hume's ideas about durability in art, involves a specific kind of objectivity.

## Making Sense of Nature

The change in the status of nature can also be seen in terms of an attempt to overcome the sense of detachment from the world that I am linking to scepticism in epistemology. If the knowledge provided by the new sciences leads to an increasingly mechanistic conception of nature, how do people deal with their non-cognitive relations to external and internal nature that do not fit into a mechanistic picture? Knowing that one's profound attachment to a landscape has a causal history and depends on a causal basis in one's organism does not exhaust the individual, symbolically mediated nature of one's response that may find its expression in music, literature, or visual art. The non-cognitive relations have to do with a new sense that 'internal' and 'external' nature are inseparable. If nature is seen just in mechanical terms, self-consciousness, and people's affective relations to the world, arguably lose much of their content. (The tedious contemporary discussions over whether pain, love, etc. are 'real' testify to the persistence of versions of this idea.) However much these phenomena become explicable in natural scientific terms, their role in the generation of sense is not fully articulated by such explanation. Why would something which is really just a configuration of atoms in accordance with physical, chemical, and biological laws *matter* in the ways that form the substance of human culture? It is in aspects of the work of Kant that the tension and interaction between the objectifying view that underlies the success of the sciences, and the sense-generating 'subjective' perspective starts to become really apparent, and aesthetic considerations play a major role in this.

Kant seeks to show that non-empirical forms of thought, of the kind characteristic of rationalism, are required if the necessity in cognition is to be established which the contingency of perceptual data precludes in Hume. However, he also argues that these are active forms, which need perceptual 'input' to synthesize into cognitive content: hence the idea that the forms are 'synthetic a priori'. Interpreting this view has led to many complex debates in the history of philosophy since Kant. What is at issue is how lines between subjective and objective, internal and external, culture and nature, freedom and necessity are drawn. Aesthetic responses to these divisions help to show why the lines seem never to be definitive in philosophy, and why the aim of being definitive may be misconceived anyway.

Rather than assuming a 'dogmatic' (i.e. theological) basis for the necessity of laws of nature, Kant argues that the necessity now lies in the 'spontaneity' of subject's rule-governed cognitive activity. Hume's sceptical questions are

not (and this further underlines my basic contention) seen by Kant as invalidating the science epitomized by Newton's laws, but rather as showing that we have no adequate account of *why* that science is valid. Kant's question is what makes such science possible, which cannot just be Hume's 'constant conjunction' of phenomena, because there must be that to which the conjoining of phenomena is manifest and intelligible. The underlying question therefore has to do with the 'fit' or the 'interface' between the spontaneous rule-bound operations of the mind and what the mind 'receives' from nature, where nature itself gives rise to the mind that seeks to know it. What is given in receptivity is indeterminably diverse and particular, whereas, if ordered cognition is to be possible, the mind must involve a series of unifying operations which make different perceptual elements into things that can be identified, related to each other, seen as caused by each other, etc.

This much is standard fare in accounts of the history of philosophy, but the main aim of Kant's philosophy is not to provide epistemological foundations for scientific knowledge. Rather, by giving an account of how knowledge, which is always dependent on the ordering of intuitions by concepts, coheres into systematic form, Kant wants to establish humankind's place in a world that is rationally intelligible, without making 'dogmatic' assumptions. Keith Thomas (1983) showed that what is behind the different senses of nature in this period relates to major historical changes in Europe. The tensions between different senses of 'nature' in Kant are manifestations of these changes. Nature in what Kant calls the 'formal sense' is that which is subject to necessary laws generated by the understanding's capacity for ordering 'intuitions'. The key question for Kant is actually how rational self-determination—acting according to norms we freely impose on ourselves—relates to the deterministic system of natural laws whose particular instances we know through the understanding. At this point the sense of dislocation which we have been observing takes on a new form, via the way Kant's distinction between nature as it appears to us from nature as it is 'in itself' is often understood. As Cassirer argues (1931), Kant himself does not regard this distinction as some kind of alienation from the world. He sees it rather as a means of avoiding metaphysical claims that involve invalid attempts to get beyond the limits of thought, but the effect of the distinction on others goes beyond this aim.

By separating the deterministic world of appearance from the world in itself, and restricting claims about the former to what there is perceptual evidence for, we are, Kant believes, able to generate more and more reliable knowledge, without making unwarrantable speculative claims. Making sense of the world cannot, though, be achieved solely by establishing particular

laws: 'reason' therefore seeks principles that will unite the particular knowledge generated by the understanding into a coherent world.[2] It does so in terms of 'ideas', such as the idea that the whole of nature is indeed subject to necessary laws. This idea cannot be verified, as we don't have empirical access to the whole of nature, but it allows us to make sense beyond merely accumulating particular 'conditioned' examples—i.e. examples which gain their determinacy through their relations to other particulars—by thinking how they interrelate as parts of an 'unconditioned' whole.

## The Sense of Judgement

Reason's most crucial role only becomes apparent when we take account of the aspect of human existence which is not subject to the laws governing the perceptual world. This, for Kant, is the possibility of self-determination in terms of the moral law, which can countermand natural urges that would otherwise determine us. He follows Rousseau in rejecting the idea that freedom consists in just being able to fulfil one's desires, because that would make us slaves to our passions. Reason involves a transcendence of the given by a 'spontaneity […] through which our reality would be determinable without requiring the conditions of empirical intuition' (Kant 1968 p. B. 430), so that there is a 'causality through freedom'. Importantly, Kant also refers to the understanding as a spontaneity, because it is of a different order from the conditioned natural phenomena which it judges in terms of categories and concepts. The connection to aesthetic issues lies precisely in the question of judgement as a function of the understanding, and in how it forms a bridge between understanding and reason.

The 'power of judgement is the capacity to judge the particular as contained under the universal' (Kant 1977 B p. XXVI). The problem Kant confronts in his account of judgement in the *Critique of Judgement* (*CJ*) was already present in the first Critique: if a concept is a rule for identifying an object, how is the decision made as to which rule is applicable to a particular object? That decision cannot be governed by a rule, because it would result in a regress of rules for judging which rule was the appropriate one. Kant maintains, therefore, that 'the power of judgement is a particular talent which cannot be taught

[2] In this sense, as Markus Gabriel (2015) has argued, the world as a whole is not an object of knowledge, and, in Kant's sense, does not exist, because reality for him can only be attributed to what is given in empirical intuition and ordered by the understanding. On the notion of 'world', see Ch. 6.

but only be practised' (Kant 1968 A p. 133). This already adds a pragmatic dimension to any account of the actual functioning of cognition, suggesting, as Montaigne already had, that attention to the fallibility of judgement is a vital aspect of any philosophical account of knowledge's place in the world. The regress of rules is another version of a classic sceptical trope, which Kant then links to the question of how concepts get formed at all.

Kant's response to this issue is regarded by Heidegger in his *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* as the essential element of the first Critique. This is because it concerns how anything in the world makes sense at all, rather than there being a wholly arbitrary world consisting of an infinity of different particulars. The distance from the faith in divine order that Montaigne still possessed, despite his awareness of human fallibility, could not be greater than in Heidegger's construal here. He takes Kant's account of the 'productive imagination' in the 'schematism chapter' of the first Critique as the key to the meaning of the critical philosophy, and although he interprets the implications of this differently, so in certain respects does Cassirer (see Cassirer 1931).

The question in schematism is how things come to be understood as determinate, given that no two things in the perceptible world are strictly identical. The concept of a 'dog' (Kant's example) enables my imagination to represent a dog without having an image of a specific dog 'before/in my mind' (the vagueness of such expressions is instructive). This happens by virtue of the 'schema', a kind of shiftable spontaneous frame that makes it possible to see chihuahuas and Great Danes as being the same *qua* dog. It is, though, no use saying, in the manner of empiricism, that the schema is an abstraction from multiple different empirical images of dogs. The point is the capacity to see anything as a dog at all, thus the capacity to unify some parts of 'the sensuous manifold' furnished by perception into things that can be identified by a concept. Such unification precedes conceptualization, and what is in play here is essential to the aesthetic dimension's relationship to sense-making. This concern with pre-conceptual unification also relates to the changes in the understanding and composition of music in this period, which come to see music as closely connected to other ways in which sense is made of the world (see Chapter 4 with respect to rhythm, and Bowie 2007).

Kant famously remarks that schematism is 'a hidden art in the depths of the human soul' (Kant 1968 B pp. 179–80, A pp. 140–41) whose true workings we will probably never be able to fathom, and which first makes conceptually identifiable images possible. Sense is generated by an 'art' (in the sense of a capacity, a *techne*) which produces intelligible forms that can order empirical intuitions in a manner which cannot be fully transparent to us, because

intelligibility itself depends on this production. The model of something productive which cannot 'look at' itself producing—one does not see oneself seeing, one sees one's eyes—is central to aspects of German Idealism and particularly to the early Schelling's conception of art as involving 'unconscious productivity'. This is why Heidegger connects schematism to his own reflections on 'being', the prior 'ontological' fact that there is an intelligible world at all, which precedes any 'ontic' investigation in the specific sciences or any philosophical explanation of the locus of that intelligibility. What first emerges in the *Critique of Pure Reason* eventually leads Kant to the explicit connection of issues from epistemology to aesthetics.

In the wake of the eighteenth-century discussions of 'taste' touched on in the previous chapter, Kant, in the *CJ*, helps establish a key aspect of the aesthetic dimensions by investigating the fact that judgement is not something confined to cognitive relations to the world, but also includes judgements of what pleases or displeases us. Most importantly in the present context, he seeks to understand how the different kinds of judgement relate, and to specify the nature of validity in aesthetic judgements, given that they are inseparable from the subject's affective relationships to what is being judged. In doing so, he puts in question key distinctions that are still often used to separate different domains of philosophy. This questioning points to shifts in the functioning of value in capitalist modernity that are central to the story I wish to tell, and will be explored in more detail in Chapter 5. The very fact that Kant adds a third Critique, in which judgements about the beauty of nature, which play no significant role in the first and second Critiques, are central, is a symptom of such shifts in valuation. In the *Critique of Judgement*, 'reflective judgement', which moves from apprehension of particulars to the formation of general concepts, is both a response to the cognitive dilemma of induction and what is required for aesthetic perception based on how the parts of something are seen as unified into a meaningful whole. The question of how the cognitive and the aesthetic relate, given that, for Kant, both are about unifying diversity and so generating sense, goes to the heart of modern philosophy.

## The Senses of Nature

Kant suggests why the meaningfulness encountered in aesthetic perception becomes so important when he contends that we now derive no pleasure from the ways in which forms of unity are manifest in nature's being organized into species and genera, such that we can make conceptual judgements,

but that 'in its time there must have been some [pleasure], and only because the most common experience would not be possible without it did it gradually mix with simple cognition and was no longer particularly noticed any more' (Kant 1977 B p. XL, A p. XXXVIII). This suggests that the root of knowing is connected to the 'capacity for desire/appetite' (*Begehrungsvermögen*), which is part of our 'nature', in a sense of 'nature' that will be elucidated in a moment. Kant maintains that 'between the capacity for cognition and the capacity for desire/appetite the feeling of pleasure is contained, as is the power of judgement between understanding and reason' (Kant 1977 B XXIV). The capacity for desire/appetite is a part of 'nature' which has a 'subjective' aspect. The notion of taste, as we saw, involves discriminations that can develop from involuntary sensory preferences that may be explicable in terms of objective biological laws discovered by the understanding, to sophisticated aesthetic judgements that can be refined and altered through reason-based argument.

Contingent individual preference, say, for one kind of wine over another, which Kant sees in terms of 'the agreeable', is part of our 'nature' because it need not involve reflection (though it can come to involve it—discriminations in such preference can be learned). The agreeable is contrasted with 'the beautiful', which involves a normative demand that others agree on the evaluation of the object in question. Kant thereby suggests a continuity between what falls in the 'space of reasons' and what precedes this. Cognitive judgements and aesthetic judgements begin with something that derives from a sense that is prior to judgement, but which can lead to normative demands for justification. Divisions between the cognitive, the ethical, and the aesthetic may therefore occlude important aspects of the connections and transitions between those spheres. The 'formal' sense of 'nature', which deals only with judgements about what can be subject to necessary laws, is therefore widened, because normativity seems to be involved in 'nature' itself, particularly as it is manifested in rational beings (see Ginsborg 2015, and below).

This extension of the concept of nature is underlined elsewhere in the third Critique, when Kant discusses the notion of 'genius', 'the talent (gift of nature) which gives the rule to art. As talent, as an innate productive capacity of the artist, itself belongs to nature, then one could also put it like this: genius is the innate capacity of the mind [*Gemütsanlage*] (ingenium), *by which* nature gives the rule to art' (Kant 1977 A p. 181). Art requires rules to be intelligible, but if art could be produced just by following rules, 'judgement about the beautiful would be determinable by concepts' (Kant 1977 A p. 185). These concepts would precede the particular work of art, whereas rules of art can only arise

from what has already been produced without rules as art by genius. The question is therefore what the status of such production is. Kant maintains that it 'belongs to nature', as it cannot be reduced to what can be acquired by learning socially generated rules, even though the formal and craft aspects of the art in question still have to be socially schooled.

Kant's notion of genius, which develops out of an eighteenth-century tradition (see Cassirer 1994: vol. i), is not intended to elevate certain human individuals to a higher status. It is instead a response to construing creative activity wholly in terms of rules, which results in the same kind of regress Kant identified with respect to rules of judgement. What emerges is, though, not an explanatory foundation that stops the regress. Instead, the idea emerges that what is produced before the development of the explicit space of reasons always already involves kinds of sense that are required if we are subsequently to understand 'nature' in terms of rules. The interpretation of how this initial kind of sense relates to what can be inferentially articulated in the space of reasons has a major effect on how one conceives of priorities in philosophy. This can be illustrated by the recent debates around the work of John McDowell as to whether 'intuitions' in Kant already have 'conceptual content', rather than being more akin to sense data.

There are tensions here between the ways in which the notion of 'nature' are used by Kant. He says of natural beauty: 'It admittedly does not really extend our cognition of the objects of nature, but it does extend our concept of nature as just mechanism to the concept of nature as art: which invites us to deep investigations concerning the possibility of such a form' (Kant 1977 A p. 77). Nature in the formal sense is determinable by rules which synthesize the ways it appears to us. But this is precisely what Kant excludes from judgements of natural beauty. Because such judgements are non-conceptual, they lack objective necessity. He also links such judgements to the 'intelligible', non-appearing domain where freedom is located. If freedom were to be empirically manifest and classifiable by a concept it would be subject to deterministic laws. This entails a contradiction, so freedom can only be manifest in symbolic form, as part of the aesthetic domain. At the same time, Kant insists that beauty is not a property of the object, because it depends on a feeling in the subject. In order for the dimension he requires to be accessible, 'nature' itself has to impel something in the genius which transcends rules, and so makes new rules in art possible.

In the discussion of the sublime, Kant also talks of 'nature outside us, or also within us (e.g. certain affects)' as being able to be sublime by being able to get

beyond the 'obstructions of sensuousness' (Kant 1977 A p. 121), which connects 'natural' affects to reason's transcendence of the limits of understanding. The problem that has echoed since the time of the *CJ* is that something in the subject—hence the idea of affects as 'nature within us'—is to take us beyond the restrictions placed on the understanding that make possible what Kant means by 'objectivity', and yet can make a claim to validity. A judgement that something is beautiful is not the expression of an individual preference, because that could just be the result of a causal process, but instead involves a normative demand that what I judge to be of a certain value should be judged in the same way by others.[3]

In the *CJ* Kant links the way beauty is apprehended to the notion of natural teleology, because both have to do with how the object has been produced 'purposively', rather than mechanically. In 'purposive' production, the object's constituents combine to make something which would not be possible if they were mechanically combined: instead of a chemical paste, or a series of chemical reactions, so to speak, you get a plant, a human being, etc. Kant thereby analogizes the organism to the work of art. He has, though, to avoid positive claims about natural teleology: these would involve precisely what the first Critique argues against, because they would be claims about nature 'in itself'. The sense we see in organisms lies in the fact that '*[a]n organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and on the other hand also a means.* Nothing in it is in vain, pointless, or to be attributed to a blind mechanism of nature' (Kant 1977 B p. 296, A p. 292). We can understand this because we have the capacity for reflective judgement that is also the basis both of our appreciation of the unity of the parts of artworks and of our formation of concepts.

Patricia Kitcher, reviewing Hannah Ginsborg's book cited above, questions Ginsborg's strong reading of Kant's view of natural organisms as displaying the same kind of normativity as is present in our pre-cognitive responses to nature:

> Although I agree with Ginsborg's general point that the fact that a pre-cognitive response is natural does not preclude the possibility of taking a normative attitude towards it, because such an attitude is a necessary

[3] How far this situation actually applies in epistemology has been an issue in contemporary debates over the normative status of cognitive justifications in the work of Robert Brandom, Huw Price, and others.

> condition for the possibility of cognition, the case of organisms seems different. It seems to me that the Darwinian revolution undermines Kant's transcendental defense of teleology.[4]

The relatedness of the parts of an organism that is also structured by biological principles accessible to the understanding can, since Darwin, be explained by series of linked contingent events over huge spans of time, rather than, as in Kant, by invoking a possible inherent purposiveness in nature.

If we reject the strong reading, the relationship between the natural and the cultural with respect to aesthetic responses still remains an issue, however, because the sense made by art and the sense made by natural beauty seem in some respects inseparable. Both, for Kant, involve a unity which the subject understands in terms of 'reflection', rather than mechanical connection that can be described in concepts. The question of the priority of natural or artistic beauty connects to crucial aspects of modern philosophy because of what it reveals about subjectivity. Consider the following passage from the *CJ*, where the two domains are brought close together:

> The charms of beautiful nature which are so often encountered as, so to speak, fusing with beautiful form belong either to the modifications of light (in colouration) or sound (in notes). For these are the only sensations which are not just feelings of the senses, but which allow reflection about the form of these modifications of the senses, and thus, so to speak, contain in themselves a language which leads nature to us, and which seems to have a higher sense. (Kant 1977 B pp. 171–2)

Elsewhere Kant talks of a 'code through which nature talks to us figuratively in its beautiful forms' (1977 B p. 170, A p. 168). I have shown elsewhere (Bowie 2003; 2007) how the idea of 'a language' in play here is assimilated in this period to the new status taken on by music (see also Neubauer 1986). Wordless music lacks concepts but involves 'reflection', and this is understood as connecting us to nature in ways which concepts can obscure. This change will have profound implications for how language itself is conceived, and how it can be related to philosophical reflection on art.

[4] http://ndpr.nd.edu/news/61821-the-normativity-of-nature-essays-on-kant-s-critique-of-judgement/

## Language, Art, and Nature

What is it that leads in the eighteenth century to the questioning of the capacity of concepts to articulate forms of sense, like music, which affect how we think of language in relation to nature? The short answer is that music compensates for the hollowing out of aspects of theology concerned with 'transcendence'—think of Kant's remark about 'higher sense'—because it comes to be regarded as a means of 'saying the unsayable'. Just what this rather indeterminate idea entails is, however, not easy to explicate. One philosophical phenomenon of Kant's era—to which Kant himself does not pay a great deal of attention—suggests why, namely the concern with the origin of language that results from questioning its divine origin. Questions about language's origin relate to the ideas about nature's relationship to art that we have just been considering (on details of this connection, see Cassirer (1994: vol. i), and Chapter 4). Language can only function if it involves adherence to socially enacted rules, but the genesis of such rules cannot itself take place in terms of rules. How, as Schleiermacher asks, is the first linguistic rule learned, and what makes it a rule at all (see Bowie 1997)? The 'production' of language is not a 'reflective' process, because it is not the conscious product of any person.

Communicable thought depends on language's prior existence, so language can be regarded as a part of 'nature', in the way Kant invokes 'nature' to account for what cannot be the result of conscious intention or rules, but which yet is a condition of making sense. Language arises through interaction between people and with 'objective' nature—in the sense of the German '*Gegenstand*' that we saw earlier, which 'stands against' the subject—thus through practice that is regularized, because what is rule-less makes orientation impossible (for a detailed account of this issue, see Cassirer 1994: vol. i) and Chapter 4). Hamann makes the point in his 'Metacritique' of Kant (1784) that language is both sensuous and intelligible: 'words are both pure and empirical *intuitions* as well as pure and empirical *concepts*: *empirical* because the sensation of sight or sound is affected by them, *pure* in so far as their significance is not determined by anything which belongs to those sensations' (Hamann 1949–57, vol. iii: 286); on this see Chapter 4). The practice of linguistic articulation is part of human 'nature', because of the impulses which inform and direct it. It is the interplay between regularization and impulse that is crucial here, because the same interplay is, as the notion of genius suggested, essential to works of art.

The preceding discussion may seem just to make the notion of 'nature' contradictory, but, as Adorno argues (see Bowie 2013), such conceptual contradictions in major thinkers like Kant are better seen as expressions of real historical tensions than as a philosophical or logical failure. What matters in the present context is how Kant's distinction between nature *qua* deterministic system and freedom *qua* self-determination relates to how we are understood as part of nature in modernity. As Albrecht Wellmer puts it, what is at issue here is 'not the nature of scientifically objectified brain processes, but the living nature of our body with its neediness, its impulses, its potentials and its vulnerability' (Wellmer 2009: 220). That living bodily nature, which Montaigne already puts at the centre of things, is disclosed in our relationship to the symbolic forms and practices which make sense of existence in ways that accumulating objective knowledge may not.

The conception of living nature suggested by Wellmer becomes important in modernity, particularly in relation both to the idea that humankind is merely one further mechanical part of objective nature and to encroaching commodification. These produce dialectical counterparts, in which what is obscured by the notion that our impulses and needs are just a product of natural mechanisms, and a new sense of the intrinsic importance of human individuality, seek expression. This change also relates to shifts in the scope of the term 'language' in the period. In this perspective, which is developed philosophically in the work of Schelling, Adorno, and others (see Bowie 2013, and the following chapters), a different sense of freedom emerges. Freedom becomes the capacity to change our relationships to the given, in order to make sense, especially of what may be opposed to us. Music's new responses to and expressions of sadness, loss, tragedy, trauma, etc., from Bach to Schoenberg, Coltrane, and beyond, can exemplify what is meant here, and these responses and expressions influence how language is understood. Without the resistance generated by such phenomena, there would be no ground against which freedom could be exercised. This sense of freedom is germane to the growing philosophical significance of art, and to major developments in art itself from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards.

## Aesthetics and the Aims of Philosophy

The preceding discussion has focused particularly on how aesthetic issues emerge in relation to the ways nature is conceived, and how human relationships to nature shift in the modern period. In the coming chapters the focus

will move rather more towards art's significance for philosophy; so I want to conclude with some remarks on the implications of what Kant says about art and beauty (for a more detailed discussion, see Bowie 2003). Kant asserts that beauty in art 'must be *regarded* as nature even if one is aware of it as art' (Kant 1977 B p. 180). The intentions that produced it should not be apparent, because that would reduce it to pre-existing rules. The principle of art that engages people is 'the capacity for the presentation of *aesthetic ideas*; but by an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which gives much cause for thought without any determinate thought, i.e. *concept*, being able to be adequate to it, which consequently no language can completely attain and make comprehensible' (Kant 1977 B pp. 192–3 Loc. 2668; see Bowie 2003: ch. 1 and Neubauer 1986 for discussion of the influence of this idea on music and thinking about music). Aesthetic ideas enable free play of the imagination in creating new images and associations which need not result in anything conceptually determinate. Such play needs no extraneous purpose (these ideas are a major influence on Schiller's idea of the centrality of play in 'aesthetic education'), even as it can also contribute to the development of our conceptual capacity. The experience of art therefore involves an aspect which takes it outside any means–ends nexus. In a world which gives rise to questions about the dangers of 'instrumental reason', this suggests a further way in which the primacy of knowledge for philosophy can be called into question. The early Nietzsche claims, as we will see, that only art can 'justify existence', because knowledge can offer no such justification once theological assumptions are undermined.

For Kant, aesthetic ideas symbolize moral qualities which cannot appear in the empirical realm (and so cannot be known), such that 'the imagination spreads over a quantity of related ideas, which let more be thought than can be expressed in a concept that is determined by words' (Kant 1977 B p. 195). Imagination is the basis of art that is '*full of spirit*', and judgement is the basis of '*beautiful* art' (Kant 1977 B p. 202). The former enlivens the 'capacity for cognition', without it having to be used to determine specific phenomena. The latter, via the pleasure occasioned by its form, points to something that can be shared by all rational beings that is 'perhaps' an indication of 'the supersensuous substrate of humankind' (Kant 1977 B p. 237, A p. 234). This 'substrate' is the foundation of morality, which transcends 'determination by nature' (Kant 1977 B p. 215) and so escapes the causal regresses of the world of appearance. Any more definitive claim would be dogmatic, but the fact that Kant thinks in this direction is significant. If the aim of his philosophy is to understand how freedom and necessity relate, in order to make sense of the place of rational

beings in the world, the fact that it is in relation to aesthetics that Kant makes some of his more far-reaching suggestions cannot be overestimated.

Kant's thinking on aesthetics highlights his concern with relations to the world which cannot be grasped in cognitive terms, although they can play a role in what makes cognition possible. The assumption that aesthetic judgements are inescapably subjective might seem likely to repeat in the aesthetic domain a version of concerns about Cartesian epistemological scepticism. However, there is no sense in Kant's aesthetic reflections of the split between subject and world that he is seen by some of his critics as introducing through the distinction between appearances and things in themselves. It is precisely the status of the work of art as an empirical object accessible to the understanding, and yet only intelligible as art if the object as described in physicalist terms is bracketed, that is philosophically crucial. (As we saw, and will see again in Chapter 4, there are important parallels to language here.) This status already circumvents scepticism about 'knowledge of the external world', because the cognitive relationship to the object, which is open to sceptical doubt, is not decisive for its importance as art.

Doubt here instead relates to the intersubjective status of art as what can reveal things about the world, but which does so in relation to the affective nature of the individual subject. The intersubjective status of art does not, however, issue in mere randomness. If it did, disagreement about aesthetic evaluation would not play the considerable social role it does, where people enter the space of reasons to defend their assessments. Kant underlines the importance of this role when he connects art to the highest aims of his philosophy, which are essentially normative. Knowledge generated by the understanding is not the final aim here, because without the wider perspective of reason, such knowledge can be contingently particular. As Cassirer, Nelson Goodman, Hilary Putnam, and many others observe, pointless knowledge can be generated in almost any situation, and it is the judgement as to how particular knowledge fits into a wider interpretative whole, which includes ethical considerations, that is decisive. That kind of judgement has, as we have seen, close relationships to what makes art significant for philosophy, and cannot be exhaustively methodologically described, as this would lead to further regresses. What Kant sees in the *CJ* as connected to philosophy's highest aims does not issue in anything definitive, but is instead characterized by open-endedness, in which more can be 'thought than can be expressed in a concept that is determined by words'. Vital insight can therefore result through participating in sense-generating activities that cannot be exhaustively comprehended by a theoretical account of the sense that is so generated.

I am not concerned here to make any strong claims about the interpretation of Kant's philosophy: the very fact that the history of its reception is so diverse poses complex questions about the relationship between the interpretation of philosophical texts and of works of art, if neither is ever definitive. Instead, I just want to use exploration of one strand of Kant's thought to adumbrate some of the agenda for the coming chapters. One important factor with regard to the aesthetic dimensions is that discussion of their significance can be misleading if it concentrates too much on questions of 'beauty'. This gives rise to the problems involved in the historical mutability of what is regarded as beautiful, to the point where the content of the term can become indeterminate. Kant himself makes an important differentiation by insisting that universality of pleasure is necessary for beauty. This links the issue to the new concern in the bourgeois era with how social consensus on value can be achieved without coercion. Moreover, his attention to what is not essentially based on beauty is evident in his analysis of the sense-generating aspect of imagination that is not restricted to providing material for cognition. So how can discussion of beauty be integrated into a wider perspective on the meaning of the aesthetic dimensions?

From the eighteenth century onwards, discussion of taste and beauty tends, as we saw, to focus on whether beauty is a property of the aesthetic object or a product of the subject's response. This alternative is itself already a manifestation of a notional split between subject and world. A large amount of debate in aesthetics has since focused on seeking to answer the question, with certain generic arguments recurring, especially in the light of Kant's reflections. At the risk of sounding glib, it seems clear that without intentional directedness and affective responses of the subject there can be no beauty, and that where there is beauty there must be something beyond the subject that is the occasion of the response. One can argue as to whether this makes beauty a property of the object, etc. (which can lead to strange philosophical hybrids like 'response-dependent' properties: if something is proper to something, how can it depend on something else?), but the pay-off of such argument is unclear. What is interesting here is instead the way consideration of beauty reveals things to do with the subject's connection with the world, not another rerun of an epistemological version of idealism versus realism that comes down on one side or the other.

The issue of beauty can be focused by the fact that the same questions need not apply to cognitively determined properties of the object. There are good grounds for assuming that, unlike what is involved in beauty, these properties exist in some way, even if they are not apprehended; but deciding exactly how

entails giving answers to many still contested questions. The very nature of scientific inquiry could, though, be said to depend on some such assumption—Kant, as we saw, analogously treats the assumption that all of nature is in fact law-governed as an 'idea'. What matters most in our context is, however, as Cavell maintains, that it is a social fact that arriving at intersubjective agreement in aesthetic evaluation is possible. This gives such judgements their own 'logic', but 'our judgements, so far as aesthetic, would remain as essentially subjective, in [Kant's] sense, as they ever were' (Cavell 1976: 94; for more on the 'logic' of such judgements see Chapter 7). This view sustains an ineliminable moment of detachment between subject and world, because there is no guarantee that agreement is possible, hence the element of 'subjectivity'. At the same time, it acknowledges that aspects of the world give rise to forms of attachment and engagement that have a specific value which is independent of value expressed in quantifiable forms. This value is 'to the subject', but the important thing is how it also transcends the subject, because it can be intersubjectively shared, and can be the object of communication and argument, in the way ethical matters are. The significance of such value grows in a period where other forms of value, most notably those associated with mathematized science and the commodity form, create new kinds of detachment from the world, even as they bring massive civilizational advances (see Chapter 5). There is a further dialectical aspect to this process that Horkheimer and Adorno explore in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the means whereby humankind gains more and more control of the nature that 'stands against' it can also distort and repress aspects of the living nature we are, to which Wellmer refers. This situation both gives rise to heightened attention to the significance of beauty and results in beauty itself coming into question.

The beginnings of aesthetic modernism in Baudelaire, Manet, and others (see Pippin 2012) already make it evident that beauty need not be essential to works of art, as the title of *Les Fleurs du mal* suggests. The opening up of new sense by art need not always entail judgements involving pleasure or moral symbolism. This raises the question of how art is to be interpreted whose value does not consist in its beauty, in the sense of its evoking a delight that could be universally shared.[5] The analogy of art to nature breaks down here,

[5] Clearly there is art that portrays things that are seen as 'ugly' from early in the history of art—tragedy, after all, is about some of the worst things imaginable—but such art tends to transform the significance of the ugly by its incorporation into the work. The difference in modernism is that it asks questions about the value of beauty and of the kind of positive transformations of sense that art effects. Karl Rosenkranz, a Hegel pupil, publishes his *Aesthetics of the Ugly* in 1853, noting the lack of any systematic treatment of the topic until his own. He locates the ugly between the beautiful and the comical: 'Every aesthetics is forced in describing the positive determinations of the beautiful somehow also to touch on the negative determinations of the ugly' (Rosenkranz 1853: 5).

as natural beauty does not have a straightforward counterpart in nature that lacks beauty, and yet has its own value, whereas art's refusal to evoke pleasure can be as significant as its ability to do so.[6] The value of art now starts to become linked to issues concerning truth, such that art can change the scope of debates about truth in modern philosophy.

Such ideas are often dismissed from a semantic perspective. Ernst Tugendhat, for example, maintains in relation to Heidegger's view of art and truth that 'it may be correct that art has something to do with truth, but this can hardly be demonstrated by pointing out that a work of art has the function of showing something' (Tugendhat 1992: 430). In the light of the Nazi aestheticization of politics, the failure of German humanist culture to act as an effective bulwark against Nazi barbarism, and Heidegger's own role in politics, Tugendhat is understandably suspicious:

> it is characteristic for the entire tradition of philosophical romanticism from Schelling and Hegel to Heidegger and Gadamer that, in ever new ways, an ontologically inflated conception of art became a substitute for the question of the justification of norms and that it was in every instance an obfuscation of the concept of truth.

However, the lack of any reflection on the part of Tugendhat as to *why* art takes on such philosophical significance from the end of the eighteenth century onwards should give pause for thought, especially in the light of his admission in his book on analytical philosophy: 'The question of what it means to understand a linguistic expression seems, if we do not deceive ourselves, as unexplained as it ever was' (Tugendhat 1976: 520). If this question has to do with the genesis of sense, and many modern philosophers link that genesis to what happens in art, there are reasons to re-examine the tradition which Tugendhat largely rejects, not least when how we justify norms can be instructively linked to how we make and respond to art. In the period after Kant, the conception of art arguably does become 'ontologically inflated', but the reasons for this can be more informative than the inflation itself. What is happening in philosophy for this to occur? Such questions can best be responded to by looking at the role of art in German Idealism and early German Romantic philosophy, and in those who respond to their ideas.

[6] Rosenkranz suggest the asymmetry when he maintains: 'If the beautiful did not exist, then neither would the ugly, for it only exists as the negation of the beautiful' (Rosenkranz 1853: 7), being 'only *relative*' to beauty's 'absolute' (p. 8).

# 3
# The Aesthetic Demand

## Epistemological and Aesthetic Absolutes

Why does art's significance for philosophy in Europe intensify in the remarkable way it does towards the end of the eighteenth century? Odo Marquard tells a story in which there is a move from the rise of aesthetics at the end of the eighteenth century, to 'anaesthetics' later in the nineteenth. One response to filling the gap left open by secularization—art—is replaced by hopes for medicine, and subsequently psychoanalysis, to redeem some of the pain of post-theological existence (Marquard 1987).However, the emergence of aesthetic modernism in the middle of the nineteenth century, in which the idea of art as theological compensation gives way to art's rebellion against many established ways of making sense, and against the increasing reduction of value to what can be quantified, suggests the limitations of this story (see Pippin 2012). An account of this change must be part of any reflection on the role of art in philosophy in modernity. The period in philosophy from Kant until the death of Hegel is hugely complex, and its history is still the subject of intensive research, but tracing connections of the expansion of aesthetic concerns to concern with scepticism in this period can offer an illuminating way of rethinking the development of modern philosophy.

This chapter will move towards an examination of the fact that, having established the main elements of his system in the *Logic* and the *Encyclopedia*, which, along with the *Phenomenology*, have had considerable influence on recent philosophy, Hegel continued to lecture on aesthetics until the end of his life.[1] His doing this can suggest both that there was 'unfinished business' with respect to art's location in his philosophy and that the contemporary reception of Hegel may be underplaying some vital issues. Before we get to this issue in Hegel, though, we need to trace how the art/philosophy relationship changes in the wake of Kant's and others' philosophical innovations, many of which involve new responses to the threat of scepticism. Hegel's

[1] I have dealt with the issues in his period in much greater detail elsewhere (e.g. Bowie 1997; 2003, which cite more textual evidence than I provide here).

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response to scepticism connects closely to new ideas about art in early German Romanticism, and there are paradigmatic differences between the ways these thinkers respond to those ideas.

Many of the key questions in Kant result from how he conceives of the relationship between what the world contributes and what the mind contributes to knowledge. In contemporary analytical philosophy this is still mainly regarded as an epistemological issue, or as something to be conjured away by neuroscience, but in Kant's period the issue had much wider ramifications. One way of framing the questions that form the focus of German Idealist and early German Romantic philosophy is to ask about the location from which the relationship between spontaneity—the activity of the subject—and receptivity—the subject's being affected by the world which it seeks to judge in objective terms—can be understood. German Idealism considers the idea that spontaneity is itself also in some sense part of the subject's 'nature': it is not in the subject's initial control, as we don't decide to think and know; rather, it happens to us as part of what Marx will term our 'species being'. Similarly, receptivity is given to the subject by the nature which it seeks to order via the capacity of spontaneity: again, we don't decide to perceive: it happens via a capacity we can enhance, but which we don't originate.

Construed in a strong Idealist manner (something like this is argued by Salomon Maimon 2004; see also Frank 1997), the locus of understanding the relationship between the subject and the material of its knowledge could be seen wholly in terms of the subject, because the material of receptivity is actually the subject's own 'intuitions'. All that is left 'outside' the subject here is the thing in itself, and this might even be said, from an Idealist perspective, to be itself the product of thinking—Hegel will see the idea of the thing in itself as the cognitive *result* of subtracting everything we know of the object from the object. In this view, the relationship between subject and object falls within an encompassing whole which is itself 'subjective'. Construed in a non-Idealist manner,[2] in contrast, both the spontaneity of the subject and what it synthesizes are part of an encompassing whole which is 'nature', and so 'objective', because the subject–object relationship itself arises as part of a process that is dependent on natural necessities.[3] Nature thus comes to 'grasp itself' via the split between its subjective and objective aspects. In both cases there is an assumption that radical splits between differing aspects would open the door

[2] I am wary of using the term 'realist' here, given how complex its application has become in the light of recent debates: what Schelling and others mean by it is not straightforwardly translatable into contemporary terms.

[3] This is roughly still the case in many versions of philosophical naturalism.

to scepticism, and a higher unification is therefore sought, beyond the relationship between the aspects. This unification is itself 'absolute', in the sense of not being relative to anything else; but what 'absolute' means depends on specifying the exact nature of the relationship. The structures here are roughly what Hegel explores in the 1805 *Differenzschrift'* (*Differenz des Fichteschen und Schellingschen Systems der Philosophie*), where he sees Fichte proposing a version of the Idealist option, and Schelling a version of the naturalist one (I have simplified the positions so as to make the basic issue clearer). In both cases, the point is to move from what is seen as a dualist position in Kant to a version of monism that does not open up a scepticism-threatening gap.

The fact that Schelling moves in the 1790s between a position close to the idealism of Fichte, to the (in certain respects) 'naturalist' position he terms *Naturphilosophie*—positions which would seem to be essentially opposed—suggests how complex things can get here. The vital point for us is that in this phase of his philosophy, particularly in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), Schelling gives art a central role in understanding the absolute. What is in question here still preoccupies much contemporary philosophy: namely, how to conceive of the emergence of mind, subjectivity, consciousness—once again the indeterminacy of just what is meant by these terms is part of the issue—from a 'physical' world. This world's law-bound functioning seems not to require 'mind', yet without mind, knowledge of its laws, or even experience of a world at all, would be impossible. Significant parts of modern philosophy consist in attempts to reduce one side of the notional split between mental and physical to the other. This is a legacy of responses made to Descartes's separation of thinking from extended substance. German Idealist and early Romantic philosophy take up the legacy of this separation, but they seek to interpret it in a way which does not just lead back into epistemically conceived sceptical doubt, but takes seriously *why* a sense of separation of mind and world arises in this way. Novalis talks in this respect of philosophy as the 'drive to be at home everywhere' (Novalis 1968: vol. iii, p. 434, no. 857), which is predicated precisely on not being 'at home'. This drive may have no determinable object beyond a sense of lack, which can involve a sense of the limitations of our knowledge, but also concerns what we value. How this sense of lack is responded to will be a crucial issue, in which art often plays a major role.

At the same time as being concerned with a subject/object split, the thinkers in question here largely adhere to a version of monism, which seeks to confront the fact that, as Schelling puts it, 'one can push as many transitory materials as one wants, which become finer and finer, between mind and

matter, but sometime the point must come where mind and matter are One, or where the great leap that we so long wished to avoid becomes inevitable' (Schelling 1856–61: vol. i/2, p. 53). The problem is that, if the unity of mind with matter is asserted in philosophical form, this will be from the mind side of a relationship that involves both the identity of mind and matter and their difference. If the latter is absent, both become indeterminately the same. There has, then, to be an aspect of mind which is not transparent to itself *qua* conscious thought, because it is rooted in 'unconscious' material nature, but this aspect must still be inseparable from consciousness. The question is how this aspect can be comprehended.

As we have seen, concern with aesthetics in modernity has to do with the changing relationships between subjects and the nature of which they are a part. This was suggested by the heightened attention to 'taste', which is both a natural sense that we do not initially control and yet can come to involve judgement in the space of reasons. In one respect the relationship between the subject and the object of taste therefore does not involve an epistemological gap. Even hallucinated experiences of taste have a moment of indubitability: a feeling affects me in a specific way which differs from other feelings, even if I can't say what it is, and which I may recognize if it occurs again. The sceptical moment arises here because intersubjective agreement on judgements of taste can be elusive, opening up a gap between subjects that points to divergences in how subjects construe the world. At the same time, there can, even though it may be distorted by manipulative interests, also be consensus on taste, without which the very constitution of culture would be incomprehensible. Kant saw the attempt to achieve this consensus by justifying judgements of taste as essential to cultural cohesion. Taste connects our natural, impulse-driven, embodied existence to our reflective capacity, and this capacity, which depends on intersubjective communication, makes taste into a source of insight into what we wish to advocate as being of value. This combination of what is given by our natural constitution as organisms that distinguish between the pleasurable and the non-pleasurable, and the capacity to think about what we so distinguish, is part of what leads Schelling to his idea of art as involving unconscious and conscious 'productivity'. One should not think here of 'productivity' as having a producer that intends a product. The term is used instead to convey the idea of something which cannot be seen in purely causal terms, because it can become self-determining via a capacity for reflection, and so can transcend the causal nexus.

The issue for Schelling here is that the 'production' of conscious thought itself is not something accessible to consciousness—remember the metaphor

we saw in Chapter 2 of not being able to see yourself seeing. Nature has to develop to the point where it becomes conscious of itself in living beings, which entails a separation between subjective and objective. What precedes the separation has still to be 'in action' after the separation, as the process via which conscious representation is produced. We don't, as we saw, decide to think, and biological processes are necessary for thinking to happen. But this leaves a gap between productivity and product: how can the relationship between them be grasped? That would require a higher perspective that encompasses the two, but such perspectives can, *qua* cognitive perspective, only be from the position of consciousness, which precludes what is demanded. We therefore cannot *know* the nature of this relationship, but it still demands a response.

It is at this point that Schelling elevates art to the highest philosophical status. The detail of the argument in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (*STI*) is notably coherent, if overly schematic (see Bowie 1993; 2003). The key point, however, stands independently of the validity of how Schelling makes the argument—his reliance on natural teleology with respect to organisms is questionable in the light of modern biology, as it was in the case of Kant. Rather than being primarily concerned with scepticism about knowledge, the *System* is concerned with things that can be known *qua* objects—works of art are also knowable empirical objects—whose meaning transcends what can be known. Art is significant for precisely this reason, because it connects us to the world in a way objective knowledge may not. It is the sense which art *adds* to the world that is decisive. Such sense can never be final, as that would reduce art to what can be conceptualized, when the point is that art can keep generating new sense.

What kind of sense is this, and what are its implications for modern philosophy? Schelling says of the production of art:

> nature begins unconsciously and ends consciously, the production is not purposive, but the product is. In the activity which we are talking about here the I must begin with consciousness (subjectively) and end in the unconscious or *objectively*, the I is conscious according to the production, unconscious with regard to the product. (Schelling 1856–61: vol. i/3, p. 613)

Consciousness in the *STI* develops in a history of the subject, which begins with natural unconscious activity that then develops toward reflective, conscious awareness. The meaning of art cannot be determined in the way that concepts identify objects. As Kant argued, if art could be produced by

following rules, the play of the imagination would cease, even though, without any 'conscious' rules to transcend, the artist would have no basis for the production of new sense. This situation points to a division in the development of modern philosophy, which becomes apparent in the ways the idea of the absolute is explored. In the Romantic approach, the absolute is characterized precisely by its non-transparency to conceptual thought. This means it needs to be manifest in a way which is appropriate both to its ineluctability and to its conceptual inaccessibility. In the approach, exemplified by Hegel, making consciousness transparent to itself via exploration of its relationships to the world means that the absolute is present precisely in philosophy's ability to articulate how subject and object relate.

Idealist and Romantic philosophy remain significant in contemporary philosophy because of their responses to historical and other change. In varying ways these responses make philosophy itself, probably for the first time, into something fundamentally historical, and so introduce a new sense of relativity into how the world is manifest. The challenge is to interpret this relativity, and this entails some account of, or response to, the absolute. Modern science destroys old beliefs and theories and replaces them with ones which usually have greater warrant. The response to this situation in much of the history of modern metaphysics is to seek ways of neutralizing the fact that theories keep being refuted, in the name of establishing ways of justifying fundamental truths about what there really is. From one perspective this seems a necessary move. At a semantic level, truth is an absolute concept: bivalence is inherent in assertions, so this seems the obvious recourse for metaphysics. In many versions of this approach, such as Bernard Williams' 'absolute perspective' (by which he means the perspective of the modern physical sciences), the absolute would be the wholesale correspondence of what is asserted about the world to the world itself. As should already be clear, though, that is not how Schelling conceives of the absolute. Instead, he is concerned with how sense emerges which depends on what we can understand by concepts, yet transcends this understanding, so connecting consciousness and nature. Whereas philosophy deals in concepts, abstracting from the empirical, art is empirically embodied, and yet involves the kind of sense philosophy seeks to understand, but in ways which are resistant to discursive articulation. Were that not the case, one could dispense with art by explaining what it says in conceptual terms.

Knowledge of nature through the understanding can only ever produce specific determinations that science seeks to bring into systematic coherence with each other, and these determinations keep changing as knowledge

progresses. Art resists such determination by being open to ever-renewed interpretation, and so manifests the way in which sense comes into being at all, as is suggested by Schelling's concern with the move from unconscious to conscious. It is precisely, as the Romantics will contend, the changes in the way art is understood and responded to that are decisive, rather than any specific interpretation of a work. This openness to new sense also links art to freedom: freedom, as Kant insisted, cannot be empirically manifest in the world of the understanding. The understanding seeks to determine appearances, and freedom cannot be determined as something in the empirical world, which is wholly subject to natural laws. Art objects become art precisely because they transcend what can be known of their material basis. This, for Schelling, means that art is 'the only true and eternal organ and document of philosophy, which always and continuously documents what philosophy cannot represent externally' (Schelling 1856–61: vol. i/3, p. 627).

## The Search for the Ground

Schelling arrives at this conception while in contact with Friedrich Schlegel and other early Romantics in Jena in the 1790s, and it is they who offer the most novel ways of developing and elucidating the consequences of taking art as decisive for philosophy. As we shall see, Hegel is heavily critical of the way the Romantics conceive of the absolute. However, he is at the same time significantly dependent on their ideas. As I have shown in detail in Bowie 1997 (see also Franks 2005, and https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/friedrich-jacobi/), a key figure here is F. H. Jacobi, who, probably more than anyone, focuses the concern about scepticism in this period. The patterns of thought in Jacobi derive in part from his interest in the tradition stemming from Montaigne and Pascal, and they turn out to relate to crucial issues concerning how to understand value in the modern world. Jacobi poses questions whose recurrence in recent epistemological debate relating to McDowell's *Mind and World* (see Bowie 1996) suggests that he touches a nerve in many areas of modern philosophy.

In his criticisms of Kant in the first book on Hume published in continental Europe, in 1787, Jacobi argues, taking up a sceptical concern, that in Kantian terms: 'all our knowledge is nothing but a consciousness of linked determinations of our own self, on the basis of which one cannot infer to anything else' (Jacobi 1787: 225). This idea is echoed in Donald Davidson's assertion that 'nothing can count as the reason for holding a belief except another

belief' (Davidson 1986: 310). McDowell thinks that this leads to a 'coherentism that threatens to disconnect thought from reality' (McDowell 1994: 24), and this leads him to precisely the foundational issues that recur in much of the debate over epistemological scepticism. The fear is that '[w]hat we wanted to conceive of as exercises of concepts threaten to degenerate into moves in a self-contained game' (p. 5), which echoes Jacobi's claim in his *Jacobi to Fichte* of 1799 that, without an adequate grounding: 'Our sciences, merely considered as such, are games which the human spirit thinks up to pass the time' (Jacobi 1799: 24).

McDowell is mainly concerned that philosophy should lead us away from thought being a 'frictionless spinning' with no justified cognitive contact with reality, which makes what we know inexplicable. He is, though, unlike many analytical epistemologists, also concerned with the metaphysical and existential implications of the epistemological problems: 'It is true that modern philosophy is pervaded by apparent problems about knowledge in particular. But I think it is helpful to see those apparent problems as more or less inept expressions of a deeper anxiety [with respect to how we relate to the world]' (McDowell 1996: xiiixiv). Despite this, McDowell, and most of those who respond to him, largely continue the tradition influenced by epistemological doubt, which seeks philosophical justifications for knowledge. Jacobi, in contrast, is more concerned with the existential fear that without a ground the genesis of knowledge is just, in a variant of the regresses we saw in previous chapters, the production of endless chains of 'conditions'. One thing is the basis of the explanation of another thing, etc., which leads into an 'abyss', and so to 'nihilism'. A world of 'conditioned conditions' is just a mechanical system, and Jacobi's concern is that this renders thought an ultimately meaningless production of regresses of conditions.

Jacobi develops his thoughts in relation to Spinoza's idea of determination as negation, which he sees in terms of things being 'conditioned' by what they are not:

> if everything which is supposed to arise and be present in a manner which we can comprehend has to arise and be present in a conditioned manner; then we remain, as long as we comprehend, in a chain of *conditioned conditions*. Where this chain ceases we cease to comprehend and the context which we call *nature* itself also ceases. (Jacobi 1916: 276).

If explanation relies on finding conditions, searching for the intelligible ground of nature involves 'having to discover *conditions* of the *unconditioned*', which

is a contradiction. Jacobi at this point makes a theological leap of faith in God as the 'unconditioned', thus as the absolute. In a way which Heidegger will later echo, this makes explanation subsequent to 'disclosure' and 'revelation':

> In my view the greatest achievement of the researcher is to disclose [*enthüllen*] and to reveal [*offenbaren*] ***existence*** [***Daseyn***] […] Explanation is a means for him, a path to the goal, the proximate, but not the final purpose. His last purpose is that which cannot be explained: that which cannot be dissolved, the immediate, the simple. (Jacobi 1916: 90)

The philosophical resonance of Jacobi's position—related versions of which we will repeatedly encounter in the coming chapters—lies in his picture of a world whose determinacy depends on relations between things which condition each other. This leads to the question of what grounds the relations, making them significant beyond their simply not being the things that they relate to. Schelling suggests the problem here when he talks of Fichte's Kant-inspired idealism as a circle 'inside which a nothing gains reality by the relation to another nothing' (Schelling 1856–61: vol. i/4, p. 358), which is echoed in McDowell's notion of 'frictionless spinning'. Hegel and others will argue that 'revelation' as a means of stopping the regresses of conditions is 'dogmatic', a form of 'immediacy' that requires explication to make any kind of sense. However, the way in which it emerges in Jacobi's argument also leads in the direction of the Romantic responses to these issues.

The link to aesthetics here lies in the connection of the idea of 'revelation' to the genesis of sense that motivates engagement with the world. This sense cannot itself be further explained, precisely because explanation depends on it. In Lee Braver's phrase, which he uses in relation to Wittgenstein and Heidegger, it is a 'groundless ground' (Braver 2014). The genesis in question precedes the sceptical problematic, because the latter results from the separation of the relations between things that make them determinate from the sense that grounds those relations. What is in question here is a version of what Heidegger means by ontological difference: without the world showing up as intelligible in the first place, the systematic determination of what things are in cognition cannot occur. The epistemological version of the sceptical problematic relates, then, to the latter, and does not affect the former. Sceptical doubt cannot even occur without the assumption of an already intelligible world, namely the world we negotiate daily, whatever doubts we may harbour with respect to justifying our knowledge of it (see Chapter 6).

This approach offers another way of thinking about the contradiction which has concerned us from the outset. The root of modern scepticism lies, in this view, in the relationship between the immediate experience of sense in the world, without which we cannot function at all—let alone question the justification of knowledge—and the increasingly systematic production of knowledge based on 'conditioned conditions'. Aesthetics has, then, to do with the realization of how meaningfulness depends on the former, because it underlies our sense of value in life and the world. Without the world giving rise to both cognitive and other active responses, which are the initial sources of value, cognitive grasping of the world has no motivation, and its products have no intrinsic value. That is what Jacobi means when he talks of nihilism being a result of the world being apprehended just in terms of 'conditioned conditions'. It is because value is an ineliminable aspect of this prior level of sense that aesthetic considerations become central to how philosophy reflects on our relationships to the world. The contrast with Hegel will lie in the way that he tries to dissolve this level of sense into a new kind of philosophical articulation of sense, so 'mediating' what he thinks is still dependent on 'immediacy'. The continuing importance of art in the contemporary world suggests that Hegel's attempt to transcend this level of sense may not achieve what it sets out to do.

One way of bringing out what is at issue here is briefly to look at how it presages conceptions which play a major role in certain areas of modern philosophy (these will be examined again in more detail in Chapter 5). The model we have just observed in Jacobi can be seen as having echoes in Marx, with respect to the relationship between use- and exchange-value, and in Nietzsche, in the account of science in *The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music* (*BT*) (1872). In Marx, the indifference of exchange value to the qualitative nature of the objects whose value in the commodity market it expresses means that commodities are made determinate by their relations to other commodities, not by their use value or by their aesthetic value. The capitalist economic system which comes to span the globe in modernity can thus be said to be constituted in terms of 'conditioned conditions'. This gives rise to questions about value which is not so constituted, which will become apparent in the increased attention to the significance of art.

In the *BT* Nietzsche thinks the 'principle of sufficient reason'—'everything must have a cause/reason'—means modern science leads into the 'abyss', an endless regress, where what is articulated in the chains of causality which science discovers lacks any meaning. Again the question is what would ground

the meaning and value of scientific discovery, because each part of the chain only has a negative status. Nietzsche thus effectively repeats aspects of Jacobi's claims about nihilism.[4] These examples involve the sense of a gap between how the world is articulated and how this articulation can be grounded. This relates to the concerns of the sceptical tradition, but the gap is here constituted in terms of meaningfulness or value, rather than epistemologically conceived truth. Once again, then, the deeper implication of sceptical reflections is not concerned with knowledge, but with how major determinants of the modern world in the economic and scientific spheres can, while bringing about endless new possibilities, also undermine sources of value and meaning (see Chapter 5). This idea will be central to Frankfurt School Critical Theory (see Chapter 7).

The issue of 'grounding' in modernity is, then, inescapable, but may be better understood as a reflex of historical circumstances than as a search for a specific answer to a series of philosophical questions. Jacobi announces a kind of 'end of philosophy', and one can also see this as pointing to a philosophy which does not follow the dominant aims of Western metaphysics. Paul Franks suggests that, even for Kant, scepticism is essentially an academic problem: 'It can trouble you only if and when you philosophize professionally, but not when you lead your everyday life' (Franks 2005: 194). In the wake of Jacobi, however, for German Idealist thinkers 'skepticism is a *lived* problem, or at least one that affects one's life' (p. 194). The challenge they see is to construct a philosophical system that will avoid the threat of nihilism: 'for the German idealists the *success* of modern physics has only made their nihilistic effects worse. To account for everyday life—that is for an everyday life that deserves the name, a life of immediacy, saved from nihilism—is the most urgent task' (p. 196). The aim must be a 'redemption of the everyday' (p. 197) that also incorporates an adequate philosophical response to modern science. The terms Franks employs already point in the direction of aesthetics, which has often since been thought of in terms of the redemption of the everyday, e.g. by Stanley Cavell. Franks, however, pays little attention to this, beyond citing a few remarks from Fichte and Schelling, being more concerned with theological issues. The key point is the relationship of the idea of art as redeeming the everyday to the search for a philosophical system that can comprehend the absolute.

[4] One might include Saussure here: the links between his theory of the sign and Marx's view of money have often been pointed out, and Saussure himself linked the sign to money. In both cases 'negative' relations between elements of a system, in one case of language, in the other of the exchange value of things, determine the value of the elements in the system (see Ch. 5).

Manfred Frank (1997) has argued that the difference between German Idealist and early Romantic philosophy lies in their responses to the question of how such a philosophical system is possible. On the one hand, any attempt to make an account of the world coherent contains a demand for systematicity; on the other, having a system is no guarantee that it can be grounded: paranoiacs, after all, often think very systematically. Frank construes other differences between the philosophies in terms of a 'realist' aspect to Romantic thought that harks back to Kant, particularly in Schlegel and Novalis, that is lacking among the Idealists, particularly Fichte and Hegel. The difference may, however, be more informatively manifest with regard to the role and interpretation of art in the respective philosophies. Let me now try to give a condensed version of a direction of Romantic thought that is most significant in relation to our questions, in order to situate the ensuing discussion of Hegel's persistent focus on aesthetics.[5]

## Romantic Negation

The core issue here is how to conceive of negation. Both Idealists and Romantics see the fact that particular theories are constantly being refuted, not as leading in the direction of sceptical nihilism, but as what makes it possible for the world to be more effectively articulated. In his lectures on *Transcendentalphilosophie* of 1801, which Hegel may have attended, Friedrich Schlegel puts it like this:

> Truth arises when opposed errors neutralize each other. Absolute truth cannot be admitted; and this is the testimony for the freedom of thought and of spirit. If absolute truth were found then the business of spirit would be completed and it would have to cease to be, since it only exists in activity.
>
> (Schlegel 1991: 93)

So how does this relate to the demand for a response to questions about the absolute? Novalis claims in his *Fichte Studies* that the 'Absolute which is given to us can only be known negatively, by our acting and finding that no action can reach what we are seeking' (Novalis 1978: 181). The crucial issue is the differing responses of the early Romantics and of Hegel to the assumption

[5] The direction of Romantic thought described here can easily be confronted with other aspects of their thought that point in other directions, but I suspect it is the one which will prove most durable.

that the absolute must transcend negation, but that philosophy depends on negation to articulate the idea of the absolute. Hegel will seek to turn this situation into a new approach to justification that has had considerable influence on the work of Robert Brandom and others, and it is how this approach relates to his aesthetic reflections that counts in the present context.

Neither Schlegel nor Novalis construes the issue predominantly in terms of knowledge: they talk of the absolute in terms of doing something, rather than just of making a claim. Even as they have to articulate their approach by making claims, they think that claims are themselves inherently subject to regresses of justification. This is one source of the Romantic conception of 'irony', where a statement negates its meaning, even as it is asserted. Irony for them reaches its extreme when statements are made about the absolute, and this leads to the idea that art and irony are closely linked. Schlegel maintains, for example, that 'If all truth is relative, then the proposition is also relative that all truth is relative' (Schlegel 1991: 95): the assumption of the absolute is still present, but the question is how it relates to propositional truth. This leads to the Romantic idea that the form in which philosophical claims about the absolute are made contradicts their propositional content: understanding the absolute therefore has to be enacted in other ways.

But can Novalis's claim about a search which is doomed to failure be taken seriously as a response to a philosophical dilemma, rather than being a vague metaphor associated with Romantic 'longing'? The philosophical radicality of what is being suggested here cannot be conveyed by a summary. This would just say that we become aware of something via the failure of our attempts to express it, making it awareness of an 'I know not what'. The power of the approach only emerges in the ways in which the activity Schlegel and Novalis invoke is concretely carried out, which is why what they say leads in the direction of art. Schlegel's statement can be elucidated by his further assertion: 'In truth you would be distressed if the whole world, as you demand, were for once seriously to become completely comprehensible. And is even this infinite world not formed by understanding out of incomprehensibility or chaos?' (Schlegel 1988: vol. ii, p. 240). Here we come to the perhaps startling idea that the aim of epistemology, if achieved, would actually involve nihilism, because what motivates knowledge would lose its force, everything having been explained. This may sound rather overblown, but its implications should be taken seriously, because they reflect an aspect of what actually happens in philosophy. The implications reveal something important about the relationship of philosophy to art, and inaugurate a new sense of what modern philosophy might achieve in relation to the advance of specific cognition in the sciences.

Philosophy here involves a constitutive failure, which cannot eventually be overcome by successfully achieving the goal of articulating the absolute. The expression for the absolute is often seen as taking the form 'A = A', the 'proposition of identity', which is either mere tautology, or, since Parmenides' 'for thought and being are the same', the highest philosophical expression of how thought grasps the world.[6] Novalis has this to say about identity:

> The essence of identity can only be demonstrated in a *pseudo-proposition* ['*Scheinsatz*']. We leave the *identical* in order to represent it—Either this only apparently happens—and we are persuaded to believe it by the imagination—what already Is *happens*—naturally via imaginary separation and unification—Or we represent it by its non-being, by something non-identical—a sign. (Novalis 1978: 8)

Any split in the absolute introduces relativity into it, so the true expression of the absolute cannot be a relationship in the form of an expression of the identity of two terms. But in that case there can be no expression of the absolute, just an undifferentiated, inarticulable One: 'A'. In order to articulate the absolute it must, Novalis contends, be symbolically expressed, which makes us 'leave' the identical, giving two different As that have to be unified in a relationship. This is a 'pseudo-proposition', because a 'real' proposition is not possible with respect to the absolute. The asserting of the proposition of identity is itself, then, precisely an example of 'our acting and finding that no action can reach what we are seeking', and yet this constitutes 'the Absolute that is given to us'.

It is here that art, as a symbolic form, comes into the picture, because it involves such action. This can be thought of with respect to both the production and the reception of art. As we saw, if art were to be produced 'mechanically', it would be graspable in cognitive terms, as the result of the application of already existing rules. Instead, it is the way that art transcends the given that is decisive, namely by adding to the revelation of the world and creating new sense. This sense is not something fixed by the producer of art, because it depends on interpretation, be it that of a performer of a piece of music, of the reader of a text, etc. While interpretations may just be demonstrably wrong—from wholesale playing of what is not in a musical score, to wrong inferences in relation to the sense of a text—that does not mean that there is one right interpretation. The greatest art lives precisely from its being reinterpreted,

[6] See Heidegger's lecture on 'The Proposition of Identity' from 1957 (in Heidegger 1978).

adding to its articulation of sense. If we aim to say the definitive truth about art, we are doomed to failure, but (and this is the crux) this very failure points to a kind of sense. Rather than transcending temporality in the manner sought in metaphysics, this sense always has to be newly constituted in the temporalized process of engagement with art. As long as we see value in doing this, sense can be made. This approach need not involve a major theoretical claim, and is essentially empirical and historical: the history of the production and reception of art constitutes the basis of the approach.[7]

This approach is one way of responding to Schlegel's idea: 'In truth you would be distressed if the whole world, as you demand, were for once seriously to become completely comprehensible.' The assertion of A = A leads to the realization that, for example, the idea of a harmony between thinking and being may not actually say very much, and that concretely unfolding what it means is an endless process:

> All highest truths of every kind are thoroughly trivial and for this reason nothing is more necessary than always to express them anew and if possible ever more paradoxically, so that it is not forgotten that they are still there, and that they can never really be completely expressed.
>
> (Schlegel 1988: vol. ii, p. 237)

In the Romantic view, then, it is far from a given that complete cognitive comprehension of the world would actually make sense of it from the perspective of those inhabiting it.

The point of human existence might here rather be said to lie in its responses to what has not been completely comprehended, and the open possibilities this can offer, whether they be cognitive, moral, or aesthetic. Understanding another person is better seen as an ongoing process: were there to be definitive understanding, something essential would go missing. Indeed, definitive understanding seems inappropriate as a form of response to another person. In playing music, the aim may be to do it as well as it can be done; but if one could do this all the time, the point of playing, where this aim motivates study, practice, each new performance, etc., would dissolve. The goal may seem to be a merely receding one, but the fact that one can play better and better, and gain meaning from this, means that the goal functions as a means of orientation, not a final point. Such ideas give a very different image of the aim of understanding than is present in the objectifying form

[7] Schlegel is one of the initiators of modern literary history.

which dominates much modern philosophy. Schlegel talks, in a way which will be echoed by Hegel, of 'the higher scepticism of Socrates, which, unlike common scepticism, does not consist in the denial of truth and certainty, but rather in the serious search for them' (Schlegel 1964: 202). Part of the point of art in modernity lies in its responses to the effects of the expansion of comprehension of nature by the sciences.

The questions here are not just about the value of science, but about the kinds of meaningfulness that constitute the world we inhabit—above all, about the meaningfulness that makes sense of lives. This can, of course, take the form of everyday pursuits, or, indeed, of morally reprehensible aims. But only when such meaningfulness takes a form that points towards something that transcends the mundane does the link to the philosophical issue of the absolute become important. Forms of meaningfulness in art relate to the absolute because they may both transcend what we can know, and yet also involve a sense of incompleteness, serving as a reminder that the 'business of spirit' lies not in reaching a final point, but in having future goals.

Romantic conceptions of art are therefore couched in terms of 'infinite reflection', of a process of continual renewal of sense, rather than of final determinacy (see Walter Benjamin's 1919 essay 'Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism' in Benjamin 1980: i/1). This affects how philosophy is conceived:

> Philosophy thought of in a completely pure way does not have its own form and language; pure thought and pure knowledge of the *Highest*, of the *Infinite*, can never be adequately represented. But if philosophy is to communicate it must take on form and language, it must employ every means to make the representation and explanation of the Infinite as distinct, clear and comprehensible as is at all possible. (Schlegel 1964: 214)

Rather than aiming at a definitive theory, such an approach tries to assimilate the diversity of understandings of the world in the manner of Bakhtin (1982), seeing 'polyphony' as the essence of the novel. The endless possibilities of creating relationships between articulations of the world do not give rise to a regressing sceptical stance, but rather to a progressing expression of diversity which yet aims to create temporalized forms of unity.

This kind of pluralism is not equivalent to a putatively 'postmodern' questioning of the goal of truth. In such views, regresses ensue from seeking to establish the 'presence' of meaning, because the signified can only be characterized in terms of signifiers being substituted by other signifiers, in an

open-ended play of differences. Instead, Romantic pluralism involves a constant search for new illumination that is open to what may be obscured in existing forms of expression.[8] The sciences inherently give rise to regresses of justification, and this means that the Romantic absolute 'exists as that which, in the divisions and fragmentations of our world of the understanding, yet creates that unity, without which contradiction and difference could not be shown as such' (Frank 1989: 340). The last point is vital: the sense of philosophy's constitutive failure would be a matter of indifference if it did not point to a unity that makes that failure matter. Without some sense of (albeit inarticulable) completeness, the awareness of lack has no basis.

Something of what is in play in Romantic philosophy is evident in the roughly contemporaneous development of tonal music in the classical tradition from Haydn onwards, where what Frank describes occurs in a non-conceptual form, that is both affectively experienced and yet depends on complex intellectual capacities. The underlying dependence of the symphony on a unifying tonal centre enables, particularly from Beethoven onwards, more and more dissonant and disparate material to gain a new sense as part of a whole, which integrates the material when the music finally resolves into the home key. As doubts in philosophy grow over the ability to articulate the absolute conceptually, and so overcome the fragmentation produced by the growth of scientific knowledge and the new divisions of modern class, society, music, especially from the late Beethoven onwards, incorporates more contradictions, and at the same time, for example in Bruckner and in some of Mahler, becomes more oriented towards a symbolic affirmation of unity in its conclusion. This symbolic enactment of non-conceptual unification occurs in more and more expansive and emphatic form as the social and intellectual world in Europe moves further and further away from real unification. It is not that the symphonic apotheoses of Bruckner and Mahler are expressions of the absolute; rather, they express an aspiration to something absolute. As in the Romantic conception, this points to the absolute by the 'failure' that is inherent in music's transience. When the unifying centre is removed, in atonal music, the demand for some way of unifying the disparate musical material does not disappear, but becomes a central problem in how such music is to make sense, which leads to responses like twelve-tone music. What happens

[8] I am wary of any general comment about 'postmodernism', attacks on which are too often unspecific, creating a straw man. The point here is derived from one way of reading Derrida's deconstruction of meaning as 'presence', a deconstruction which, when applied, say, to Frege's attempt to specify the meaning of 'sense', has important philosophical implications: see Wheeler (2000).

in music relates, therefore, to what happens to metaphysics when the assumption of a unifying grounding principle is put in question.

## Hegel: Negation and the End of Art

How, then, does the Romantic approach relate to Hegel's attempt to articulate the absolute? Art also plays a significant role in Hegel, but it is subordinated to philosophy. Philosophy is seen as articulating a universal truth which art's connection to the world of the senses prevents it from articulating. It is not that Hegel underplays the role of negation in his approach: his whole philosophy is predicated on it. The difference lies in how he conceives of the unity which can give sense to negation. For the Romantics, the absolute is only symbolically indicated by the sense of unity required for negation to be apprehended as such, which they associate with the experience of art's infinite interpretability. For Hegel, the absolute is manifest instead in the way that negation eventually cancels itself out, when the different kinds of negation are shown to be systematically connected. Each 'negative' limit which thought encounters takes thought beyond that limit, because *awareness* of a limitation already takes one beyond it. In one sense this parallels the Romantic position. However, Hegel thinks that what results from this can be made ever more determinate by philosophy, rather than leading in the direction of continuing new revelation with no philosophical conclusion.

The following, from the *Encyclopedia*, sets out the core Hegelian stance on negation:

> But then philosophy does not stand still with the simply negative result of dialectic [i.e. when a position is refuted], as is the case with scepticism. The latter misrecognizes its result by holding onto it as mere, i.e. as abstract, negation. Because the dialectic has the negative as its result, this is, precisely as result, at the same time the positive, because it contains that from which it results as incorporated [*aufgehoben*, with its dual sense of negated and preserved] into itself, and is not without this. (Hegel 1840: 157)

The Hegelian alternative to seeking an initial anti-sceptical grounding principle in philosophy involves analysing how thought overcomes the contradictions which result from the interactions of mind and world that are always already taking place. Astronomy advances when the contradictions generated by the Ptolemaic picture enable a new theory which would not have been

possible without prior attempts to explain the motion of heavenly bodies. There is no definitive foundational point from which astronomy emerges: it is only possible because people have already looked inquiringly at what happens in the sky. Most importantly, the more developed forms of astronomy exhibit the essence of astronomy more fully than the less developed ones. Rather than the disagreements in astronomy being the source of scepticism, they are what makes more warrantable astronomy possible. The essential factor here is the exclusion of an external perspective on such knowledge. Knowledge can only be examined by looking at how it concretely comes about through the *same* thinking as is used to examine it. There is no foundational point for philosophy outside such examination that makes it only relative to such a point (see Pippin 1997). Once this is realized, the articulation of the absolute is present in the development of such examination for everything that can be an object of knowledge.

Hegel, then, inverts received assumptions about scepticism by making the fact that knowledge is subject to constant negation the basis of the expansion and improvement of knowledge. His account of the processes of negation involved in arriving at specific knowledge therefore consists in a logic of negation. The inability of particular forms of thought to grasp the absolute leads to a development of thought to the point where the structure of progressing failure culminates in the elimination of negativity, each inadequacy of thought having become the basis of a more adequate form. The notion of the whole of 'being' required for a notion of the absolute is, for example, itself initially an empty abstraction. However, realizing this is itself the condition of the need to move beyond the notion of being, into the ways in which being is determinate. The totality of these ways then expresses the concrete content of the initially abstract, empty notion:

> every step of the *progression* in further determination by distancing itself from the indeterminate beginning is also a *return to proximity* to that beginning, so that what initially might appear as different, the *regressing foundation* of the beginning, and the *progressing further determination* of the same, collapse into each other and are the same. (Hegel 1969: vol. ii, p. 570)

In this way the negations necessarily involved in thought's increasing differentiation and determination can be articulated independently of the actual empirical process of knowledge generation. What is mapped out in the self-contained structure of the *Logic* can then be shown to be manifested in knowledge of the empirical world of nature, where we move from 'immediate'

perceptual encounters with the world to conceptually informed cognition, via developing awareness of the limitations of immediate relationships to the world.

The interpretation of the relationship of the *Logic* to nature has been a bone of contention in Hegel interpretation at least since Schelling's critique of Hegel starting in the 1820s (see Bowie 1993). There seems, Schelling contends, to be no reason why there should be a transition (of whatever kind) from the Idea to nature, because such a transition is not something that could itself be rationally grounded. The world appears as rationally intelligible, but this does not explain why there is reason in the world at all. Rather than try to get through this metaphysical minefield, a more productive approach in the present context—where, as we have seen, nature is seen as not necessarily reducible to that which is the object of scientific laws—can be to consider how nature is dealt with in Hegel's reflections on aesthetics. The crucial factor here will be how forms of intelligibility which cannot be cashed out conceptually are interpreted.

Recent attention to Hegel in the work of McDowell, Brandom, and others focuses on how he sets out a critique of the 'myth of the given', the idea that there are immediate forms of contact with the world, such as 'sense-data', which are guarantees of epistemic justification (as we will see in Chapter 4 Cassirer already set out this argument in much the same terms as McDowell and Brandom). It is only by negating the indeterminate particularity of perceptual data that it can be understood through universal forms of thought of the kind demanded by the sciences. The critique leads Brandom to the claim that validity arises from the process of communication and argument, in the form of justifying the inferential commitments entailed in claims. Any other approach is likely to involve an appeal to 'immediacy', and so to some form of the myth of the given. For Robert Pippin, this means that Hegel intends us to 'leave nature behind', all forms of sense being the product of social interaction, rather than being the result of some prior source, such as what Schelling termed 'productivity', or what Nietzsche terms the 'will to power'. The idea is that such appeals are dogmatic, immediate, and themselves need justifying in the 'space of reasons', rather than being themselves the hidden ground of rationality.

Much of this approach to Hegel is undoubtedly insightful, but questions can be asked about how definitive it is with regard to the specific kinds of sense that are characteristic of modernist art in particular. When Hegel considers issues relating to nature and art, the tensions which can affect contemporary debate come to the fore. This is especially apparent in the light of the publication of transcripts of Hegel's lectures. The editor of the posthumous

standard edition of Hegel's *Aesthetics*, H. G. Hotho, demonstrably sought to commensurate Hegel's account of art with the rest of his overall system. Hegel's own live presentation, in contrast, engages with a great number of specific examples in a manner that attenuates the sense of art just being incorporated into the system. This raises questions about the sense made by art that may not be reducible to its philosophical comprehension, and, by extension, about Hegel's view of the 'end of art' as a core mode of sense-making in modernity.

The latent tensions in what Hegel says about the 'end of art' play a significant role in the philosophy that comes after him. What he tends to see as just immediacy to be overcome by philosophy's ability to transcend the particular cannot be as readily assimilated into the dominant forms of philosophy as he suggests. The kinds of sense present in art can be precisely what connect people to the world and give the world value, or express what it is about the world which distorts their relations to it. They may also be thoroughly trivial, but that is part of the challenge posed by understanding art in modernity. The really important kinds of sense in question here are, however, in certain respects arguably more fundamental than the sense that Hegel sees as the preserve of absolute knowing. The latter is arrived at by what, in the eyes of Jacobi and others, leads to nihilism, namely the realization that each particular thing is 'negative' because of its dependence on other things for its determinacy, and only reaches its truth via its incorporation into a systematic totality of negations.

The concern is that this incorporation may reduce what cannot be conceptually determined to being seen as mere immediacy. Much that makes sense of modern life, or responds to the pathologies of the modern era, however, involves forms of expression and articulation that do not fit into a story of progressive conceptual articulation of the world, in which philosophy overcomes the irrationality of dogmatic traditional attitudes and beliefs. Why otherwise would it be that, for example, from late Beethoven, to Schoenberg and jazz, to Kafka, to Manet and other modernist visual art, the most influential art lives not least from disrupting existing forms of sense-making in ways that initially make little sense—where, as Monk says, 'Wrong is right'? As the Romantics saw, art offers both possibilities for new understanding, and resistance to being assimilated into concepts, because the sense it makes emerges through the ways in which it is responded to, in the form of interpretation, performance, etc. Isolating works of art as objects to be primarily grasped in conceptual terms leads to a failure to see how art demands participation, rather than just observation, and involves forms of intelligibility which have

to 'happen' via active engagement with it. This raises questions about how truth is approached in modern philosophy, because the sense that emerges in art can change how the world is manifest to those participating in it, even though it may not be able to be cashed out semantically.

Hegel himself is explicitly concerned with the nature of the truth conveyed by art, and the question is how this relates to his conception of philosophy's explication of the absolute. His approach is initially simple, being based on the idea of *Geist* (mind/spirit—the context determines which translation would be more apt: I shall use the German word, with this proviso in mind), as the notionally inner aspect of rational beings, and how it relates to the external world through which it manifests itself. There is a subject/object division here, but not one which raises sceptical issues, because there is no doubt about the ways in which *Geist* is realized in the world. The question is how these ways are assessed with respect to philosophy. The following from the 1823 lectures shows what is meant:

> [Art] can represent the drives to a person, make what they just *are* into an object […] for the person now considers their drives, which are now for them, outside them, and they already begin to be free in relation to them. […] For by making it an object the inner comes out and stands outside the person. (Hegel 2003: 28)

Rather than keeping people 'in unity with nature', by representing that unity, art 'raises man above [nature]' (p. 28). Art mediates the immediacy of our biologically given nature: its 'final purpose […] is to reveal the truth, to represent what moves the human breast, and in a plastic [*bildlich*], concrete form' (p. 30). The 'symbolic' art of architecture, where the relationship between *Geist* and its material is initially based on practical need, and so leaves little or no space for freedom, moves towards art as concern develops with the form of what is built that transcends the immediate need for shelter. However, the material of architecture and the engineering demands of building mean that *Geist* cannot be fully free in relation to it.

'Classical' art, which Hegel associates particularly with sculpture, brings *Geist* and its material together:

> One can see mindedness/spirituality [*Geistigkeit*—the different translations suggest the range of possible interpretations of Hegel's notion of *Geist*] directly in the human form, it is a manifestation of *Geist*, not a symbol; its existence does not represent anything in and for itself, only inner

> mindedness/spirituality. The symbolic is pre-art, and the symbolic has to progress such that the spiritual becomes free and gives itself a form.
>
> (Hegel 2004: 73)

It does so by becoming manifest in a form in which inner and outer are in harmony. Hegel thinks that, after Egyptian sculpture, which is too rigidly formalized to be adequately expressive of the inner, this occurs in Greek sculpture. Here the human body carved in stone is animated by something which transcends its material nature, as part of the way the human being raises itself above its natural status: 'The sensuous human form is the only one in which *Geist* can appear. It is significant in itself; what it signifies is the *Geist* that emerges in it' (Hegel 2003: 157). Classical art 'has reached the highest as art, and what it is lacking is only that it is art at all' (p. 37), because it is still dependent on sensuous material. Rather than being an object like any other, the work involves a particular kind of intelligibility. Pippin (2012) suggests this is of the kind which enables us to interpret the deeds of others as actions, rather than as just another objectively occurring event. There can be no inferential criteria for this, given the specific, contingent historical ways in which action is manifest, in the same way as there can be no fixed criteria for which objects manifest *Geist* and are justifiably called art.

The higher form of art, 'Romantic' art, which Hegel associates with the Christian God appearing in living human form—'the representation of the human form, such that divinity is entirely present in it' (Hegel 2003 p. 181)—then frees itself from the need to rely on the material provided by the senses coinciding with what makes the art object meaningful. This can be understood by the emergence of the novel form in the early modern period (see Bowie 2003: ch. 5): the novel is characterized by its capacity to incorporate and make new sense of any kind of material at all. On the one hand, this is testimony to the freedom of *Geist* to master any material from the empirical world. On the other hand, this is why the young Georg Lukács will, under the influence of the early Romantics and Kierkegaard, see the novel as the form of 'transcendental homelessness', that incorporates the existential search for meaning resulting from the loss of theological foundations. The threat this involves is echoed in Walter Benjamin's remark I cited in the Introduction, on the efflorescence of allegory in the Baroque period, where 'Every person, every thing, every relationship can arbitrarily mean something else. This possibility passes a devastating but just judgement on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which details are not strictly that important'

(Benjamin *GS* i/1, p. 350). There are, then, conflicting construals here of what happens in modernity when the idea of harmony between meaning and its material embodiment dissolves. Hegel thinks the liberation from sensuous material is consummated in *Geist*'s transcendence of any reliance on empirical particularity. Philosophy reveals the nature of the absolute as the progressing path through negativity to a positive system of negations that can articulate the rationally accessible nature of both the natural and the social world. This is what leads to the claim that, with Romantic art, art ceases to be central to how sense is made of the modern world.

The question is whether Hegel's image of modernity matches his judgement on the 'end of art'. Pippin argues that in Hegel:

> The modern form of spirit was a world of realised freedom or of reconciled relations of persons who are free because they stand in a relation to each other in which mutual acknowledgement is at least institutionally secured […] a form of self-understanding […] where in the manner in which we make claims of each other and of the world there is no longer any remainder of a fundamental irrationality. (Pippin 2012: 61)

As Pippin makes clear, Hegel is mistaken about the capacity of modern forms of acknowledgement to lead to the reconciliation of conflicts in cultural and political life. The 'prosaic' modern bourgeois world, in which the arbitrary authority of feudalism is replaced by rational social forms, does not reconcile what Hegel thinks is the 'amphibious' nature of modern humankind, as both sensuous, embodied natural being and rational, reflective *Geist*. Pippin argues that this 'torn' nature is not 'a metaphysical problem of substance, how material and immaterial can interact' (2012:75), but that, as Hegel says: 'Spiritual education [*geistige Bildung*], modern understanding have produced this opposition' (cited p. 74).

We have here, then, a version of a key idea that I have been pursuing. Rather than the main issue of mind and world being an epistemological one, producing a history of modern philosophy as essentially one of reactions to scepticism about knowledge, the issue is instead a kind of alienation, a lack of reconciliation between what Hegel couches in terms of historically variable inner and outer. Hegel thinks art should manifest the reconciliation of inner and outer, as his account of Greek sculpture suggests. However, he sees the limitation of art in the fact that, unlike philosophy, it cannot free itself of all sense of opposition by freeing itself from reliance on the particularity of the

sensuous world. This means there can be no way back to 'classical art' (see Peters 2015), and this entails the end of art centred on a notion of the beautiful as harmony of *Geist* and sensuous form.

Hegel, however, fails to see that aspects of what he terms 'Romantic art' might offer responses to the lack of reconciliation that philosophy cannot. Note also that the situation described here comes close to what we observed in early Romanticism. There, the sense of art and its significance for philosophy lay in the irresolvable tension between the idea of the absolute as the unity which would ground the intelligibility of the world and the fact that our only access to such unity is through the failure to achieve it. But is the idea of such unity just an appeal to what Lacan terms the 'imaginary', a state of non-separation which precedes the split occasioned by insertion into the differentiation of the 'symbolic', which we then hark back to, because we feel we have lost something? That there is a danger of this in relation to art is clear. However, the motivation to engage in the sheer difficulty and complexity of aesthetic production and reception that is apparent in the modern investment in serious art speaks against reading this sense of unity as just regressive. Such investment is predicated on the drive to do something as well as it can be done, while being aware of the inherent failure this will involve.

Pippin suggests that Hegel's ideas about art's reliance on the senses in a world determined by the sciences and modern forms of law fail to take account of Hegel's own awareness of a different kind of sensuous relationship to the world that is apparent in the acknowledgement involved in understanding human actions. He gives the example of the 'difference between seeing a person or the face of a person *as an object* among others, and a seeing of the face of a person as a *face*, which demands a completely different relationship between observer and observed' (Pippin 2012: 81). An analogous difference occurs between seeing a painting or hearing a piece of music as an object of the natural sciences, and apprehending it as art. Adorno suggests a further aspect of the idea with respect to musical expression: 'music is, as it were, the acoustic objectification of facial expression, which perhaps only separated itself from it in the course of history. If "a shadow passes over a face", an eye opens, lips half-open, then that is closest to the origin of music' (Adorno 2001: 237). What Adorno points to here are forms of intelligibility which cannot be understood in terms of descriptions of objects, but have to *happen* in sensuous form for their meaning to be manifest. As Pippin suggests, these forms are non-inferential: one sees their meaning *in* them when we feel addressed by them in ways we cannot ignore, not by identifying them as cases of a pre-existing meaning (on this kind of meaning, see also Taylor 2016).

Such meanings, which can change radically in the course of history, are vital to social life, especially when (as we saw above in relation to Jacobi's presaging Marx and Nietzsche) discursive forms in the sciences and the economy come to dominate the direction of society (see also Chapter 5). The issue here is particularly striking with respect to how music changes its status in the modern period. It is precisely because music can bypass conceptuality in key respects that it takes on new significance as a means of responding to how we inhabit the world, particularly, but not exclusively, in affective and somatic terms (see Bowie 2007). Pippin considers the dimension at issue here with respect to how such meaning becomes precarious in Manet's paintings, as a paradigm of modernism. He suggests seeing 'art and the history of art as components of a collective attempt to achieve social intelligibility—how we try to make ourself comprehensible and accessible to each other—and this in a particular sensuous-affective modality' (Pippin 2012: 213). In Manet 'a crisis of scepticism with respect to the possibility of a public meaning shared by all' (p. 154) is made manifest by the ways in which the conventions of European art are undermined. The aim of beauty gives way to a new, often oblique and puzzling response to the historical failure of the aim of mutual acknowledgement. Something similar is apparent in Kafka's later stories and novels, where the sense of a breakdown of mutual acknowledgement is evident in how people are often described as acting 'as if' they were doing x, there being no secure location from which it can be judged what they actually intend to do or are doing. Similarly, Proust's novel is in this respect an exploration of the difficulty of making ourselves 'comprehensible and accessible to each other', where the difficulty is also enacted in the formal complexity of the novel's narration.

Pippin thinks that Hegelian resources, based on the aim of shared public meaning, can be used to understand this situation, if we abandon Hegel's judgement on the 'end of art'. This judgement is summed up at the end of the 1823 lectures:

> Art in its serious form is something past for us. For us other forms are necessary to make the divine into an object. We need thought. But art is an essential form of the representation of the divine and we must understand this form. Its object is not the pleasant, subjective skilfulness [*Geschicklichkeit*]. Philosophy has to look at the true [*das Wahrhafte*] in art.
>
> (Hegel 2003: 311–12)

The new insistence in this period on looking at the truth *in* art, rather than following Platonic and other traditions, which see appearance and illusion in

art as inextricably linked, will be crucial in the coming chapters. What Hegel means with respect to art belonging to the past is, as we saw, that modern societies rely on institutionalized universal norms to overcome the contradictions between peoples' divergent desires and interests—which would otherwise lead to a Hobbesian 'war of all against all'—and on universal natural laws which negate the contingent particularity of the perceptible natural world in order to explain and control it. Understanding how art transforms finite manifestations of nature into 'the ideal' by *Geist*'s manifesting itself in material form becomes the philosophical task. This means that the truth of art emerges through its philosophical articulation as part of a system which moves through the understanding of nature and *Geist* to a full theoretical comprehension of the ways the world can be intelligible.

The problem is, as Pippin acknowledges, that for all the advances in knowledge, social welfare, human self-understanding, etc. which these resources bring, they seem inadequate to respond to the need for forms of meaningfulness which can counter the disenchantment inherent in the modern world. The intensity of the investment in the production and reception of art precisely from the end of the eighteenth century onwards is in this perspective the result of a deficit in modern philosophy's ability to respond to fundamental questions of human existence. This points to a paradigmatic division.

The vehemence with which Hegel responds to Friedrich Schlegel's notion of 'irony' may have roots in personal antipathy, but it also epitomizes a crucial divide. It is far from clear exactly what Schlegel means by the term, but Hegel is pretty clear about what he objects to in it. He sees Romantic irony as a result of Fichte's influence on Schlegel: 'What is is only through the I and what is through me can just as much be destroyed by me again', such that everything is 'produced by the subjectivity of the I' (Hegel 1965: vol. i, p. 72). In consequence, the 'individual lives as artist', and 'law, social bonds, religion, love are just appearance for the individual, i.e. the individual behaves only ironically with respect to such relationships' (Hegel 2004: 21). The subject takes the 'standpoint of the vanity [*Eitelkeit*] of everything substantial', and so itself lacks anything substantial, 'is itself emptiness' (p. 21).

Hegel's reliance on negation makes this dismissive judgement seem in certain respects rather odd. The finite manifestations of *Geist* in the world are supposed to be overcome by philosophy transcending them, which makes philosophy itself in some sense 'ironic', until it reaches absolute knowing. Hegel's negation of the finite world takes place, though, in the name of a new conception of infinity. This is expressed in the development of freedom through social interaction, which reveals the limitations of immediate relations to the

world and between subjects. The conception is illustrated by the tension between the demands of the family, and the higher order of the state in Hegel's interpretations of Sophocles' *Antigone*. But, as Pippin suggests, the reconciliation of the divided nature of humankind in modernity by insight into the necessity of mutual acknowledgement that is supposed to constitute such philosophical transcendence is not fully realized. And this makes Schlegel's idea of irony as the 'constant alternation of self-creation and self-destruction' (Schlegel 1988: vol. ii, p. 109), which does not reach a point of final resolution, seem apt to the modern situation. Irony in this respect echoes Novalis' 'Absolute which is given to us can only be known negatively, by our acting and finding that no action can reach what we are seeking'. The combination of an ineliminable drive for unity with the experience of the inherent transience of the manifestations of unity can suggest why art should play a central role in coming to terms with the secular modern world. By constantly negating its previous forms, art expresses the sense that no form is definitive. This can be seen as a loss in relation to the previous aims of metaphysics, or as opening up new conceptions of metaphysics, and the difference between these two responses is apparent in many areas of subsequent philosophy.

At the beginning of the chapter I suggested that Hegel's continued attention to aesthetics might be significant in relation to his contemporary interpreters. We have seen how McDowell is aware of the deeper roots of sceptical anxiety, to which his version of Hegelianism seeks to respond. However, with the notable exception of Pippin, there is generally no sustained attention to the implications of Hegel's view of the end of art on the part of contemporary 'normative' views of Hegel.

In Brandom's pragmatist terms, which involve Pinkard's notion of the 'sociality of reason': 'Hegel construes having bound oneself by applying a concept as occupying a certain sort of social position, having a certain sort of social standing' (Brandom 2002: 31). Kant initiates the normative turn 'from Cartesian certainty to Kantian necessity' (p. 212), because he thinks that 'The urgent task becomes understanding how it is possible for us to *commit* ourselves, to make ourselves *responsible* to a norm that settles the correctness of what we do' (p. 212). Hegel fills this gap by claiming that such commitments and responsibility are constituted in relations of social recognition. In consequence 'For Hegel all transcendental constitution is social institution' (p. 216), such that 'both the self and the community achieve their status as such only as the result of successful reciprocal recognition' (p. 218). Brandom sees 'the account Hegel offers of this process of normative negotiation of reciprocally constraining authority by which determinate conceptual contents are instituted

and applied as his main philosophical contribution, at least as assessed from the frame of reference of our contemporary concerns' (p. 221). The underlying idea is that social acknowledgement enables justified entitlement to claims of correctness of assertions. The overcoming of immediacy in this sense is 'turning something we can initially only *do* into something we can *say*: codifying some sort of knowing *how* into the form of a knowing *that*' (Brandom 2000: 8).

David Cooper has suggested why this can be questionable with respect to the aesthetic domain: such approaches 'lose their *prima facie* plausibility when attention is paid to the meaning belonging to activities less commonly subjected to rational appraisal than the making of assertions. (To ask about the meaning of a painting would not, typically, involve asking about the artist's entitlement to express what he did.)' (Cooper 2003: 5; see also the discussion in Bowie 2007: ch. 5). Pippin's view indicates why this normative approach may fail to grasp all that is at stake in art in modernity. In modernity, the meaning one experiences in being addressed by innovative art and in involvement in creative aesthetic practice can be seen precisely in terms of what happens when the kind of 'codification' Brandom speaks of becomes inadequate, without there being a way of fully expressing this in conceptual terms. If 'reciprocal recognition' fails, the rationalist aim of articulating communal norms to arrive at publicly shared meanings in the 'game of giving reasons' can lose its grip. This often becomes the source of political, social and cultural breakdown, as the present conjuncture of politics in Europe and the USA makes all too apparent, but it is also what occasions responses that seek new forms of understanding beyond what is codified in existing social norms and institutions.

Such responses are themselves also the potential source of new norms that enable new possibilities of social interaction. Once again, Monk's 'Wrong is right' helps capture what is at issue here. By reconfiguring existing material in novel ways which contradict existing norms, space for new meaning is created. This adds dimensions of meaning to people's lives that only exist in the practice of engaging in the art form itself, while changing one's relation to affective and social dimensions of one's existence. Such aesthetic practices can be explained in terms of what we know about biological, historical, cultural, and other developments, thus within the game of giving reasons as seen by Brandom, but that does not explain the specific content that develops in such practices, or why *that* content gains the grip it does as a response to challenges in modern social life. The role of jazz in constituting an oppositional identity

for black people in the USA cannot be explained simply in normative terms. This drive for innovative articulation and expression that does not fit the codified norms is one indication of why in the modern period the production and reception of art in the West takes on a new significance for philosophy. The question that ensues from this is: what does this tell us about the status of philosophy?

Responses to Hegel's philosophy, such as Kierkegaard's, sometimes involve the idea of his failure to deal adequately with how sense is constituted for specific individuals, whose existence just becomes subsumed into the 'universal'. In contemporary terms, Brandom and others convincingly show how Hegel can help in giving a normative account of meaning and justification that skirts many of the traps of representationalism that are generated by the need for a philosophical foundation to explain semantic content. 'Knowing that' may in one sense—and this is consistent with Hegel's evaluation of art, which essentially assumes it is a form of 'knowing how'—be a philosophically more articulated position than 'knowing how'.[9] However, as we have seen, the crises of sense in modernity may not always best be responded to by greater cognitive insight, because this can itself in some cases blind people to what is going awry in the way the world is developing. The striking absence until remarkably recently of widespread theoretical awareness of how modern technology might create a crisis in human relationships to the natural world suggests what is at issue here. The ways in which what is behind this crisis extend into interhuman relations are becoming apparent in the often unexpected manner in which digital technology can distort human communication, even as it facilitates it in other ways.

Pippin sums up part of the basic issue in a passage about the emergence of modernism that I find myself frequently quoting:

> Art, precisely because it is a mode of non-discursive intelligibility, which does not consist in propositions, arguments, and syllogisms, nonetheless makes sense of ourselves in a way that actually resonates with what is now coming onto the scene as more important than the conscious deliberative capacities of individual subjects. (Pippin 2012)

[9] It is worth asking, however, whether understanding can really be characterized in terms of 'knowing that': does one 'know' that one has understood, given that one must presumably always already know how to understand in a sense whose explication threatens a regress of 'knowing that one knows that'? This seems part of what Heidegger means about understanding, that Braver talks of in terms of 'groundless grounds'.

Modes of participatory, non-discursive sense-making which are not oriented towards prevailing norms can sometimes offer more meaningful responses to the pathologies of the modern world. In this respect, as Pippin suggests, the idea of 'art as philosophy' is not a vague Romantic metaphor, but a concrete aspect of modernity. Brandom's 'social institution', in which claims are validated through reciprocal recognition, needs complementing, in the light of its compatibility with Hegel's ideas about the end of art, by attention to forms of public meaning which can have greater motivating power than knowledge.

In modernity, where the cognitive and technological power of natural science can greatly reduce suffering and make life more tolerable, the question is how to respond to the fact that, at the same time, social cohesion and meaningful human existence seem constantly to be at risk. Making sense of negativity in a secular world, as opposed to transcending it in religion or philosophy by revealing the supposed higher necessities it involves, is crucial to the role of modern art. The greatest music lives from its combining the acknowledgement of negativity and suffering with the development of expressive resources that both incorporate and externalize the negativity (see Bowie in Boyle and Disley 2013: ch. 9). The remarks from the 1823 lectures I cited above, where Hegel sees art as objectifying expression that liberates us from burdensome feelings—'For by making it an object the inner comes out and stands outside the person'—point in this direction. However, what Hegel sees as enabling philosophy to transcend even the most developed forms of this sort of objectification does not obviate the fact that the modern world can produce new crises of meaning, which philosophy cannot transcend by codifying norms of reciprocal recognition and enabling the rational acceptance of necessity. Art is not replaced by the philosophy of art, and can offer its own challenge, in the form of philosophy of art in the subjective genitive. The philosophy which emerges from art transcends individual affective responses, giving new sense to the world, which has an influence on modern forms of living. In the next chapter I want to suggest that some of the issues we have dealt with in this chapter appear in a related form in the conflicting ways in which language moves to centre stage in philosophy in the modern period.

# 4

# The Art of Language and the Language of Art

## The Nature of Language

The emergence of aesthetics as a concern in Western philosophy in the eighteenth century is contemporaneous with the emergence of new relationships to wild nature, with a new attention to language occasioned by questions about its divine origin, and with related shifts in the nature of music and the other arts. These changes all connect to the growing success of the natural sciences in enabling technological, rather than merely symbolic, control of nature, and to the growth of a world economy based on the commodity form, that changes the ways in which things are valued and exchanged. While it is important to attend to the specific character of each of these developments, it is also vital to consider how they are connected. This chapter looks in more detail at some changes in the understanding of language in relation to aesthetics. Connections to the other developments will thereby become apparent, and these militate against the narrowing of how language is perceived that has been characteristic of Anglophone philosophy since the beginnings of the analytical 'linguistic turn' in the early twentieth century.

In *Doktor Faustus*, Thomas Mann captures something of what underlies the main issues here. At a time when traditional, theologically grounded assumptions about how the universe is ordered disintegrate, the novel's central figure, the fictional composer Adrian Leverkühn, becomes desperate to find new kinds of order that will control the potential chaos he sees as ensuing from the aesthetic modernist liberation from tradition. The novel links his symbolic responses to this chaos in his music to the Nazi takeover, thus to an extreme manifestation of a response to the breakdown of social intelligibility that we saw Pippin associate with modernist art in the last chapter. The novel is in this respect an interrogation of how distinctions between nature and culture are arrived at when the world ceases to be seen as divinely 'ready-made', and where a unifying ground of the kind discussed in the last chapter is lacking.

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What connects this to language is that language, as we have seen, has to be located on both sides of any notional nature/culture divide.

On the one hand, the order humankind brings to nature and society depends on language as a cultural resource; on the other, language itself can be said to be a product of our natural being: nobody invents it. Language in this sense involves what Schelling in the *System of Transcendental Idealism* called 'unconscious productivity'. He later connects language to mythology, which is also not 'consciously produced' and arises as part of our 'species being', enabling a community to order what otherwise would be chaos. Schelling says (note how his characterization of myth echoes the idea of aesthetic particularity): 'One is almost tempted to say: language itself is only faded mythology, in it is preserved in only abstract and formal differences what mythology preserves in still living and concrete differences' (Schelling 1856: vol. ii/1, p. 52). Language both liberates, by creating spaces of intelligibility and forms of action, and at the same time constrains, via formal and other rules that are not consciously instituted. This involves another dialectic between freedom and nature that takes many forms, especially when considered in relation to art. The ambivalent status of language here can also make it subject to sceptical reflections. Given that language is a condition of possibility of knowledge, the new interrogation of its origins can feed into sceptical ideas involving an inherent separation between the order of language and the order of things.[1]

But why does the emergence of aesthetics as a central philosophical issue coincide with new kinds of attention to language? I want here to draw on one of the great books of twentieth-century philosophy, which, while still too often being neglected in mainstream philosophy, addresses issues that are central to the agenda of philosophy in an often startlingly contemporary manner, namely Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (*PSF*) (Cassirer 1994, first published 1923–9).[2] What is striking about *PSF* is that, while addressing those issues, it also offers a picture of language which makes some contemporary analytical philosophy of language look out of touch with the actual social and historical working of language.[3] It does so because it takes account both of

[1] This issue was in certain respects part of premodern philosophy, in the 'nominalism'/'realism' debates, but the major change comes when alternatives to theologically based conceptions of language emerge in the debates over language's origin.

[2] This is particularly the case with respect to the debate following on from Sellars' notion of the 'myth of the given' in the work of John McDowell and others. My thanks to Sam Matthews who made this connection to me.

[3] It might be objected that much philosophy of language is concerned with a 'synchronic' analysis of 'word and object', but the point of an approach like Cassirer's is to put in question the very idea of

language's relationship to natural scientific theorizing and the accompanying sceptical questions, and of the inseparability of philosophical understanding of language from issues that are connected to aesthetics. What matters most in our context is that Cassirer does not (in the main: see Chapter 6) give primacy to knowledge, but instead to *meaning*, in a broader sense than is usual in much recent philosophy. He does so because philosophical questions concerning the former would have no content without the ways in which the latter is manifest.[4]

In the wake of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Cassirer stresses that language must be understood in dynamic terms, not just as an object of analysis:

> For neither something one-sidedly subjective, nor something one-sidedly objective is designated and expressed by language, instead it introduces a new mediation, a particular *mutual determination* between both factors. Accordingly, neither the simple discharge of affect nor the repetition of objective sonic stimuli represents the characteristic sense and form of language: instead this only arises where both ends are tied into one, and a new, previously non-existent synthesis of 'I' and 'world' is created by this.
>
> (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 26)

He explicitly links this account to art: 'Art as well can as little be determined and grasped as the mere expression of something inner as it can be as the reproduction of the forms of an external reality' (p. 26). 'Feeling' and 'form' mediate each other (cf. Susanne Langer's Cassirer-influenced book, *Feeling and Form*), and this results in something which was not previously in existence. Indeed, establishing what is subjective and what is objective is only achieved in this process of mediation, which is prior to what natural science establishes as objective. Scientific objectivity itself depends precisely on the kind of history Cassirer traces, which shows how modern notions of objectivity emerge from mythical and religious forms, and how an adequate understanding of language is crucial for understanding the development of ideas of objectivity. As Habermas puts it: 'the objectivity of the world only constitutes itself for an observer at the same time as the intersubjectivity of possible agreement about what the observer cognitively grasps of what happens in the world. Only the intersubjective testing of subjective evidence makes possible the progressive

such analysis, on the grounds that it reifies its object, when that object cannot be understood separately from the history of the social practices of which it is a part.

[4] In this respect he is closer to Heidegger than is often seen.

objectification of nature' (Habermas 2005: 174). Simply assimilating what is at issue here to a semantic conception of truth fails to do justice to the historicality of the idea of 'objectivity'.

The core idea of *PSF* lies in its characterization of language, in which what the physical sound is in an 'immediate' sense, *qua* objective phenomenon, 'recedes completely in relation to what it mediately achieves and "says". The concrete individual elements of which the work of art is constructed also clearly demonstrate this basic relationship' (Cassirer 1994, vol. i, p. 27). Although the 'synthesis' required for hearing a series of notes as a melody is different from that required to hear a series of words as a sentence, 'they share the One thing, that in both cases the sensuous particulars cannot stand on their own, but are incorporated into a *whole* for consciousness and only receive their qualitative sense from this' (p. 27).[5] Such qualitative sense includes what is established in the sciences as objectively true, which, as it is in Hegel, is a result of developing forms that move from immediate stimuli to mediated judgement, and does not involve something pre-given that is re-presented in language. Once they are established, scientific truths can (assuming they prove durable) be tenseless, but Cassirer's real concern is with how the process of establishing objectivity develops via 'symbolic forms'. The philosophical task is therefore to understand how differing kinds of symbolic form function in making sense of the world. This is why his approach differs from some approaches in analytical philosophy: the interpenetration of the forms precludes a focus just on the cognitive, the ethical, and the semantic. These can only be fully understood via their relation to mythical, religious, and aesthetic dimensions of human practice, out of which modern forms of cognition develop.

For a long time parts of analytical philosophy (and certain areas of the sciences) have been dominated by versions of the assumption, deriving from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British empiricism, that cognition is built up from 'sense-data', causal impacts on the organism, which are somehow brought under laws by associating cases of their recurrence (cf. the discussion of Hegel's rejection of this assumption in Chapter 3). With respect to language and cognition, the question is how a linguistic sign manifested, say, as sound waves can be the bearer of the same meaning as another sign manifested as marks on a surface. This question also has analogies to the question of how the material of a work of art comes to express the meanings it does. Cassirer, in the wake of Hamann, Humboldt, and

[5] Cf. Wittgenstein's remark in *Philosophical Investigations*: 'Understanding a sentence in language is much more related to understanding a theme in music than one thinks' (Wittgenstein 1984: 226).

Hegel, rejects the whole empiricist picture in a way which is now echoed by John McDowell, and others:

> For it is already inherent in the concept of language itself that it can never be just sensuous, but rather represents a particular interpenetration and mutual effect of sensuous and conceptual factors, insofar as in language the filling of the individual sensuous signs with a universal conceptual meaning-content is always presupposed. (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 35)

For a sign to be a sign at all 'the basic function of meaning itself must be present and in effect before the positing of the single sign' (p. 42): the latter is just a particular application of the former.

Meaning, be it in myth, religion, art, or science, must always transcend the sensuous phenomena through which it is conveyed. It is both bound to the matter of the sign which manifests it and 'at the same time [the sign] encloses a freedom from the sensuous in itself' (p. 42). Sceptical questioning of how the relationship between word and object can be grounded works from an untenable model of the sign as a repetition of a perception of an object:

> But in truth the analysis of language shows—especially if one does not begin with the simple isolated word but rather with the unity of the *proposition*—that every linguistic expression, far from being just a copy [*Abdruck*] of the given world of sensation and intuition, instead includes in itself a determinate, independent character of the 'giving of sense' [*Sinngebung*].
>
> (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 44)

Cassirer analogizes this with what happens in an artistic drawing, whose sense depends on what it *leaves out* from the '"given" impression' (p. 44), in order to create a new meaning by connecting what is foregrounded to other aspects of sense in the world. Without the connection of heterogeneous elements, sensations are devoid of meaning.

The same kind of transcendence of the sensuous—here Cassirer is close to Hegel's critique of sense-certainty in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*—applies in the natural sciences, where the formula used to designate a chemical is not a repetition of the sensuous impressions that may have played a part in the identification of the chemical, but rather a way of connecting the chemical to 'possible "reactions" to possible causal connections which are determined by general rules' (p. 45). As such, in the most varied areas of human engagement with the world, the prior concern is understanding how meaning arises

through things being made manifest via symbolic forms which link them to other such forms. This approach allows Cassirer to avoid the atomistic approach, characteristic of some of the analytical tradition, which sees the essential task as connecting bits of language to bits of the world. Given the unintelligibility of the idea of a thoroughgoing match between the two, this leads in the direction of scepticism about meaning: why should an arbitrary noise or mark match another unrelated physical bit of the world? It is no good appealing here to convention, because the genesis of conventions itself depends on what Cassirer is exploring, i.e. the 'giving of sense': things have to be already apprehended *as* something for conventions to function. This approach also integrates aesthetics into the most fundamental questions about the functioning of meaning. If the issue is the 'giving of sense', the scope of how sense is given must include the ways new sense comes into the world, that are crucial to art in modernity.

What emerges from the historical picture Cassirer presents, which is echoed in many respects in Charles Taylor's recent arguments for a revision of the philosophy of language (Taylor 2016), is another way of looking at the modern consciousness of failure to be at home in the world, and how this relates to art. Conceptions of language in modernity diverge in ways which echo other crucial divisions over how the world is to be understood. This is apparent in the contrast between rationalist and empiricist views of language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, whose consequences, as Taylor has shown, are still present in contemporary philosophy. What can be revealed by the perspective I want to develop is how certain strands of the analytical philosophy of language are, even as they can be valid tools for understanding some aspects of language, also symptoms of what we have observed in modern philosophical scepticism's relationship to the rise of aesthetics.

Cassirer establishes the basic contrast whose consequences and roots concern us here: 'For Leibniz and the whole of rationalism the ideal being of concepts and the real being of things are linked by an indissoluble correlation: for "truth" and "reality" are basically and in their roots one' (Cassirer 1994, vol. i, p. 76). This unity is 'negated for empiricism […] the more sharply it takes language, not as the expression of things, but of *concepts*, the more certainly and imperatively the question must arise for it whether or not the new spiritual medium that is acknowledged here falsifies rather than designates the last "real" elements of being' (p. 77). The way round the differences between natural languages which give rise to the idea that they necessarily falsify reality seems to many on the rationalist side to be a 'universal grammar'. The other response, which points in a vital new direction, is 'to seek the particular

*stylistics* of every individual language, and to grasp it in its particularity. The centre of the examination of language is thereby shifted away from logic, not only towards the side of psychology, but also towards *aesthetics*' (p. 83). Both of these relate to the new centrality of subjectivity, not as the locus of contingent individual feeling and will, but in the new sense that Kant develops, which sees it in terms of normative demands shared by rational beings. As the *Critique of Judgement* showed, the scope and nature of those demands, which can also relate to expressions of affect, are part of what leads to the emergence of the aesthetic dimensions as disclosing relations to the world that cannot be fully grasped in cognitive terms. These relations are not merely 'subjective', because they involve intersubjective justification, of the kind we explored in Chapter 3.

## The Subject and the Object of Language

A key issue here is the tension between what Taylor terms 'designative' conceptions of language, which he associates with Hobbes, Locke, and Condillac, that 'favor the description of independent objects above everything else' (Taylor 2016: 189), and newly emerging 'constitutive' theories, associated with Hamann, Herder, and Wilhelm von Humboldt, in which 'language opens up new ways of articulating our grasp of reality' (p. 174). Cassirer shows how Humboldt adapts a version of the Aristotelian distinction between 'work' and 'energy' in order to get away from the idea of language as just another object to be explained: 'As little as art can language be thought of as just a *work* [in the sense of a "product"] of spirit, but rather as a form and an "*energy*" that is particular to it' (Cassirer 1994, vol. i, p. 88). The division between regarding language as primarily information-conveying designation of 'independent objects' and regarding it as world-disclosing constitution of meaning lives on in differences between analytical and European approaches to contemporary philosophy. It is closely linked to the fact that analytical philosophy often takes its self-image from the sciences, whereas the European tradition tends to see itself more in relation to the arts, as the locus of the constitution of new meanings.

Cassirer suggests what is at stake here, again linking language to art:

> The oppositions between freedom and necessity, individuality and universality, 'subjectivity' and 'objectivity', spontaneity and constraint must themselves first undergo a deeper characterization and a new clarification in principle

> before they could be used as philosophical categories for the explanation of the 'origin of the work of art' and the 'origin of language'.
>
> (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 90)

What is striking is how, in the eighteenth century, radically opposed conceptions of language crystallize into new forms. Cassirer thinks the conceptions are paradigmatically represented by Leibniz's thinking of language in terms of analysis and ordering of ideas, which links it to mathematics, and by Hamann, who argues that language originates in human drives, involving an expressiveness which is part of our natural being. These opposed conceptions echo the tensions in conceptions of nature we have already observed. Nature can be Kant's 'formal' system of necessary, mathematically expressible laws, which links it to designative conceptions. It can, though, equally be the source of expressive meanings that may be lost in its growing subordination to technological imperatives, which links it to constitutive conceptions. The further point here is that the scope of what is seen as 'language' becomes essentially contested in ways which connect to other tensions in modernity.

The contested status of language makes the aesthetic dimensions central to philosophy. If language cannot be understood just in terms of designating a ready-made objective reality, and is also thought of as the locus in which new sense is constituted and expressed, its scope extends well beyond the verbal, to forms of expression like music and painting. It is then not justifiable to argue that seeing, for example, music as linguistic is just a metaphor, and metaphor itself also has a different status, no longer being simply opposed to 'literal' use. Crucial dimensions of the sense even of verbal utterances themselves rely on the 'musical': we may recognize insincerity, lying, commitment, etc. by the tone, rhythm, etc. of utterances, and without these elements, we lose whole dimensions of sense (see Bowie 1997: ch. 6 on Schleiermacher, who offers a masterly view of this issue). Indeed, the ideas that the first language was music or that early languages were 'sung' that are present, for example, in Rousseau and others point to the concern that the initial genesis of sense may rely on what later may come to be seen as separate, non-semantic dimensions of articulation. One of the great strengths of Cassirer's account is that it does not just take the semantics of contemporary natural languages as a given that forms the main basis of theories of meaning. He attends instead to the historical development of characteristic features of modern languages, a development which shows that it is misleading to separate analysis of language from understanding the cultural and anthropological contexts in which it occurs. Understanding verbal meaning is inseparable from understanding

forms of meaningfulness that are not verbal: just think of the role of gestures in children's communication and acquisition of language. Once this is admitted, looking at the relationship of language to aesthetic questions becomes inescapable.

What Cassirer argues fits in with the critique of the 'myth of the given' in contemporary philosophy, but the scope of what his critique implies is broader. He sees his enterprise as an extended version of Kant's 'Copernican Turn', seeking 'categories of the consciousness of objects not only in the theoretical-intellectual sphere', but also wherever 'a "cosmos", a characteristic and typical "world-picture" forms itself out of the chaos of impressions' (Cassirer 1994: vol. ii, p. 39).[6] The point is to grasp forms of intelligibility which precede those that rely on the mathematical forms which enable the modern sciences (which themselves depend on such prior forms of intelligibility):

> We saw that the essential and particular achievement of every symbolic form—of the form of language, as of the mythical form or the pure cognitive form—does not consist in simply recording a given material of impressions, that already has in it a given quality and structure, in order then to graft onto it another form that derives from the energy of consciousness, as it were from outside, but that the characteristic achievement of *Geist* begins much earlier. Even the apparently 'given' proves on more acute analysis to have already gone through certain acts of be it linguistic, mythical or logical-theoretical 'apperception'. It 'is' only that which it has been *made* into in these acts. (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 117)

The 'making' in question should not be thought of in terms of intentional production according to a pre-existing conception of what is to be made, because that production itself depends upon what is being 'made', in the sense of 'rendered in a form which is intelligible'. As I have argued (see 'The Sense of Judgement' above, and Bowie 2007), a key phenomenon for understanding what does not initially lie in the 'theoretical-intellectual sphere', and is not consciously 'made', but makes sense, is rhythm.

Cassirer discusses time in mythical cultures as being 'grasped completely qualitatively and concretely, not quantitatively and abstractly' (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 133). There is no time 'in general', in the form of chronological time:

[6] Heidegger points out that Cassirer here slips into empiricist language that is at odds with his major ideas.

instead there are '"time figures", a coming and going, a rhythmical being and becoming'. Time is divided, but the divisions 'are initially directly felt, not present as measured and counted. In particular, all religious activity shows a rhythmic articulation of this kind'. Similarly, the beginnings of the discriminations that modern societies use numbers to articulate are present in a different form in the periodicity and rhythm of people's awareness of recurrences and patterns in life that are enacted in rituals and other forms of social expression. What essentially changes in the modern period is that number becomes the 'great means of connection which can also encompass the most dissimilar contents, in order to reform them into the unity of the concept' (p. 169), and becomes 'the expression of "truth" per se'. As we shall see in Chapter 5, an analogous unification occurs when modern societies increasingly subordinate things to the commodity market.

The idea of the foundational status of number goes back to Pythagorean thinking, but it is how this idea links to changes in science and the economy that makes it so essential in modernity. Whereas in traditional cultures there can be individual 'magic' numbers with a special significance, all numbers in modernity are essentially equivalent (the way in which mathematical infinity was avoided in premodern thinking relates to this: see Deutsch 2011). At the same time, the exclusion of sensuous rhythm by abstraction from forms of lived repetition that is part of the genesis of number leaves another sort of lack that demands compensation. The changes in the evaluation of music from the eighteenth century onwards can, in this respect, be seen as a way of reintegrating the sense-giving potential of rhythm into modern culture. Something related occurs in the emergence of jazz, with its liberation of rhythm in ways which bring communities together by pushing back against social, physical, and symbolic constraints.[7]

What Husserl terms the 'mathematization' of the cosmos brings about a shift in which 'the immediate, sensuous constitution of the impression, its visibility, audibility, palpability, etc., appears, measured against the "true" nature of the real, only as a "secondary quality", whose real source, whose primary ground is to be sought in pure determinations of quantity, thus finally in relations of numbers' (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 170). In this process the truth of the sensuous is obscured, and this is what leads to attention to aesthetics as a dialectical counterpart of mathematization. Note also how the relationship

[7] Evidently other things are in play here with respect to rhythm, not least its links to sexuality, and its role in all kinds of play. However, these still fit the basic idea I am proposing, namely of rhythm which connects us to the world and so functions as a counter to the social effects of abstraction.

between primary and secondary qualities, which becomes a perennial issue for modern philosophy, is here seen as generated by concrete social changes.[8]

While it would be a mistake to reduce this issue to its genesis, ignoring its genesis can neglect the fact that people successfully inhabited a world where number meant something very different from what it does in modern science and in modern economies. Something analogous to what happens with respect to numbers can be seen in relation to the word as bearer of the concept. The assumption that words are the same kind of things whatever the context in which they are used can obscure crucial ways in which what a word *is* may change. The aim of a concept in Kantian terms is grasping what is universally shared between particulars that are sensuously manifest in differing ways, and the word itself will, especially with Saussure (see Bowie 2003: ch. 3), come to be seen as constituted as a word via its relations to other words. Seen in this way, the idea that particular words can take on statuses within human practices that cannot be grasped simply by seeing their role within the system of a *langue* tends to be lost.

Taylor talks in this context of the 'Cratylist', 'figuring' aspect of language, involving '"thick" cultural meanings, concerning, for instance, rites, social relations, collective actions, hierarchical relations, modes of purity and impurity, and so on' (Taylor 2016:128). We have already seen in the preceding chapters that processes of abstraction like the one associated with language are echoed in Marx's differentiation of use- and exchange-value. The latter consists, in one respect, in relations of numbers, in contrast to the sensuous particularity that is the basis of the value of how things are actually used. The beginnings of these processes' domination of the modern world are also roughly contemporaneous with the emergence of new forms of sceptical doubt we saw in Descartes, as well as with the rise of the novel as the form characterized by the search for values in a world where transcendent guarantees dissolve, and where the role of money is often central. In all these cases there is a move away from perceptual experience, whose meaningfulness resides within it, to the sense that the quantifiable is the main locus of the reliably true. This move both enables massive, often highly beneficial transformations of the world and brings about a sense of alienation, of which epistemological scepticism is one symptom, and which elicits responses that seek to overcome the alienation.

[8] Something analogous applies to the debate on 'freedom of the will', which only emerges in the now familiar modern forms in the wake of Locke's response to the idea of universal determinism and its contrast with the new awareness of individual freedom in an expanding bourgeois society: see Bowie (2013: ch. 5).

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the very origin of the modern notion of aesthetics in Alexander Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* (1750, 1758), which we looked at in Chapter 1, is in part a salvage attempt, in which the sensuous is revalorized as the location of the *Wahrscheinliche*, even though it does not involve 'clear and distinct ideas'. The *Wahrscheinliche* is generally translated as the 'probable', but it has the sense of that which 'appears as true', which Baumgarten sees as manifest in the way in which art—and this idea remained central for Hegel—shows truth through sensuous particularity. The crucial factor here with respect to language is that it cannot be reduced to being understood in terms of a world divided into primary and secondary qualities. In his 1784 'Metacritique' of Kant, Hamann, as we saw, insisted that:

> Words therefore have an *aesthetic* and *logical* capacity. As visible and audible objects they belong with their elements to *sensuousness* and *intuition*, but in terms of the spirit of their *employment* and their *meaning* they belong to the *understanding* and to *concepts*. Consequently words are both pure and empirical *intuitions* as well as pure and empirical *concepts*: *empirical* because the sensation of sight or sound is affected by them, *pure* in so far as their significance is not determined by anything which belongs to those sensations.
>
> (Hamann 1967: 224–6)

Much of what happens in subsequent philosophical reflection on language is, at the risk of gross simplification, a result of prioritizing one or other of the 'aesthetic' and the 'logical'. Hamann means 'aesthetic' in the sense used in Kant's first Critique, where it refers to the Greek for 'perception'; but this meaning is easily shifted, as Kant realized, into a concern with sensuous particularity and the meanings it generates. The moves in early analytical philosophy towards a purified logical language, and the analytical association of the form of mathematical propositions with linguistic propositions, seek to remove the aesthetic, as the source of a supposed lack of clarity, from the logical. The modern hermeneutic tradition, in contrast, thinks an 'aesthetic' element is fundamental to language having meaning at all. Brandom talks of a split between the 'formal mathematically inspired tradition' and 'an anthropological, natural-historical, social-practical' approach (Brandom 2008: 8) to language in philosophy, and the latter is precisely what Cassirer and Taylor seek to highlight, in the name of what can be ignored by the former.

Cassirer suggests why the former tradition, with its reliance on explaining the capacity for description of independent objects, may be essentially lacking, and why aesthetic considerations are ineliminable in this area:

> For a look at the development of individual symbolic forms always shows us that their essential achievement does not lie in representing the external world in the internal world or simply projecting a completed inner world onto the outside, but that in them and by their mediation the two moments of 'inner' and 'outer', of 'I' and 'reality' first receive their determination and their respective demarcation. (Cassirer 1994: vol. ii, p. 186)

The 'border between I and reality' is not something fixed for all time, and each symbolic form first 'establishes this border—and every basic form establishes it *differently*' (p. 186). Taylor, discussing contemporary semantics in relation to the latest version of attempts to match language and thought to 'independent objects', talks of 'the power of the original Cartesian notion that thought is "inner", situated "in" the mind (the "Container" schema with a vengeance). When this construction is put through the materialistic transposition, the role of the "mind" is taken over by the "brain", which is equally an "inner" organ' (Taylor 2016: 162). He and Dreyfus ask: 'How do we know that you don't need more than the brain, maybe the brain and nervous system, or maybe even the whole organism, or (more likely) the whole organism in its environment, in order to get what we understand as perception and thinking?' (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 4). The problem is that the dualistic accounts in question just repeat in the semantic register the sceptical issues we have encountered in earlier chapters. The simple fact that thought requires articulation, using means which, as Hamann argues, also exist as part of the perceptible world, but which do not derive their meaningfulness from their status as 'intuitions', makes it clear why the question of how to get out of the 'Container' is mistakenly posed.

As Taylor makes clear, designative approaches capture certain vital aspects of language use, but extending them to being the basis of all understanding of language makes no sense: 'A truly objectivist semantics […] would anchor our language to the natural world as revealed by natural science, answering the centuries-old dream of a scientific language which really mapped the world as it truly is' (2016: 162). This scientistic dream involves a failure to grasp the significance of the changes in the understanding of language linked to the growth of concern with aesthetic issues. The idea that reductionist neuroscientific and computational models offer new, cutting-edge ways of explaining the mysteries of language comes up against the fact that such theories tend to retain traditional epistemological theories' concern with how mind can represent independent objects, and so involve the concomitant threat of scepticism. They thus offer inadequate resources for dealing with the

historical emergence and functioning of symbolic forms, which, as Cassirer insists, mediate between 'inner' and 'outer', meaning there is no fixed sense attached to either term. Concern with aesthetic issues has precisely to do with how relations to the world change historically and demand responses that do not fit into models which seek to bridge a notional gap between inner and outer. The very fact that there is a history of scepticism, in which what scepticism means itself changes, rather than the issue being identical across time, is itself an instance of how the boundary shifts. If this fact is acknowledged, it has significant consequences for the practice of philosophy.

Neither language nor art can be said to lie on either side of a subjective/objective, or inner/outer divide, because they make the world intelligible in ways it would not be without them. Even when language is being used to question whether there can actually be true knowledge, it can be said to be revealing something about the world: that is a significant part of what this book is about. Cassirer argues that the dualisms which form the focus of so much philosophical investigation need to be considered differently: 'The question must rather be whether all these divisions are also conditioned precisely *by* art, *by* language, *by* myth' (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 125), such that the meaning of what is subjective and what is objective differs in each symbolic form. For there to be meaning at all the 'mental [*seelischer*] *content* and sensuous *expression*' have to penetrate each other: content and expression only become such through this penetration, and meaning 'first constitutes this being' (p. 125), before which there is nothing meaningful. What is at issue here begins at the most basic level: 'the most simple mimetic expression of an inner occurrence […] shows that this occurrence does not form a sphere that is completed and closed off in itself' (p. 126) to which a form of expression is then attached, following a communicative convention. Rather, the expression constitutes part of the occurrence itself: mimesis, 'imitation', 'already belongs to the domain of poiesis' (p. 131), and the dualistic models that pervade key areas of modern philosophy simply do not apply in such cases.

Meaning for Cassirer, then, is not to be considered as essentially based on signs designating independent objects, with the attendant sceptical threats. Instead it involves the kinds of intelligibility which arise in the process of engagement with the world that motivate further new kinds of engagement, be they practical, cognitive, ethical, aesthetic, or affective. Objectivity in the designative sense is thus secondary to the primary constitution of meanings and the norms which they entail, that are embedded in social practices, from rituals, to differing expressive and other responses to nature, forms of social interaction, etc. Think once more of how rhythm functions as a way of

making sense of so many aspects of being in the world, and how in jazz, for example, it comes to involve contestable norms that generate creative tensions. Once the assumption of a transcendent source of meaning loses its force, philosophical, historical, anthropological, and psychological attention to how forms of meaning arise, and the significance attached to particular forms, becomes a key issue, and at this moment the aesthetic dimensions take on their modern significances.

What is most striking here is that the dimensions of language Cassirer explores so effectively, especially with respect to language's irreducibility to wholesale objectification and its consequent analogies to art, play almost no role in the perspective of some contemporary philosophy in the analytical tradition. Rather than argue in detail why this seems mistaken, I want to try to understand the significance of this repression of the aesthetic dimension becoming so widespread and splitting philosophy in ways that still have major effects today. The apparently easy answer here is, as we have seen, that analytical philosophy takes its lead from the natural sciences, and so is most concerned with philosophical issues arising from and affecting the sciences. This line already seems less convincing in the light of the fact that Cassirer himself was a major figure in public debate over the sciences in his day (see Friedman 2000); and, as Taylor says, those in the designative tradition: 'take a late-achieved, regimented language of accurate description and inference as the key to language in general, and that in the teeth of the twentieth-century philosopher who most volubly and convincingly denounced this erection of one language game into the paradigm for all, Ludwig Wittgenstein' (Taylor 2016: 114). In this respect, the later Wittgenstein is an heir to the tradition I am concerned with—though he tends to say little about linguistic innovation and historical transformations of meaning.

In Schelling's terms, the designative, analytical approaches would involve language simply as a 'product', when it needs to be understood as a manifestation of 'productivity', or, in Humboldt's terms, as 'energy'. 'The words of language are not the reproduction of fixed determinacies of nature, they designate rather directions and guidelines of determination itself' (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 260), and they are, as the history of language development shows, inseparable from the practices which they inform. The last fact alone suggests why the sceptical concerns generated by a designative approach have no real grip here. If words are generated through communication in practical contexts, they are subject to a different kind of test in the process of generating successful practices from, for example, what is involved in trying to establish how concepts correspond to objects, or in a theory of truth conditions.

How do expressive gestures enable social action when they often cannot be translated into truth-determinate utterances? Given how much of communication does not take the form of cognitive claims, Cassirer's assertion that 'language as a spiritual form as a whole stands on the border between mythos and logos, and is on the other hand midway between, and the mediation of theoretical and aesthetic reflection on the world' (p. 273) serves as an important reminder of the dangers of narrowing the focus on language. The fact that it took until J. L. Austin even for a theory of speech acts to enter mainstream analytical discourse (Schleiermacher, in contrast, already uses the term 'speech act') is one sign of the question here, but Cassirer's references to language and aesthetics suggest a deeper issue.

Cassirer's focus on myth and language directs attention to the practice of sense-making in all its forms, rather than focusing just on the representational dimension of verbal language. The analytical narrowing of focus can also be seen as linked to Weber's disenchantment, in which mythical, theological, and other meanings come to be regarded as overtaken by the capacity to subsume the world under general descriptions, particularly those involving mathematical forms. The concern to eliminate 'metaphysics' in the name of defining meaning in terms of observation statements on the part of some members of the Vienna Circle, the relegation of everyday forms of thought to 'folk psychology', the reduction of language use to being essentially a form of information exchange, all enable certain kinds of insight into the working of language. These can be productive for new forms of technology and other purposes, but at the same time leave open crucial questions concerning the intelligibility which must already be in place for these exclusions to make sense at all. Moreover, these approaches offer few resources for understanding why, as the sciences explain more and more, concern with the philosophical significance of art *qua* 'language' also intensifies, and the status of language itself becomes contested. This relates to the further phenomenon that I want to look at now, namely the emergence of modern hermeneutics in relation to aesthetics—a topic which, until recently, was hardly even mentioned in the analytical tradition, even though many of the problems involved in attempting to arrive at a theory of meaning were first addressed in hermeneutics.

## The Art of Understanding

Rather than define terms such as art or language, I am trying to suggest their significance by tracing how the meaning of such terms shifts in relation to

historical changes. Without wishing to turn this idea into a definitive theory, I do take it, in the wake of Cassirer, that the meaning of terms is predominantly established by use in contexts which both affect meanings and are themselves affected by the meanings within them. This consequence of this is that, as Samuel Wheeler puts it, there is no 'magical language', no 'system of representation such that the senses and referents of that language's terms are determined by the intrinsic nature of those terms' (Wheeler 2000: 217). Therefore, in understanding any utterance, there are no means that can be accessed independently of using the same kind of linguistic material as is used in what is to be understood. This can be construed as another manifestation of 'disenchantment', in this case of the idea of language as being decodable by accessing a privileged realm of meanings that are free of the vagaries of the historical world. However, the vital point in the emergence of the new conceptions of the aesthetic is that they create a space—evident, for example, in poetic language—which is a counter to certain aspects of disenchantment.

The scope of what is at issue here can be suggested by F. D. E. Schleiermacher's claim in his hermeneutics that interpretation is an 'art'. In one respect the claim can simply be traced to the Greeks, interpretation being a *techne*, a craft or practical ability. However, Schleiermacher specifies what he means in a manner directly connected to many of the ideas we have been considering, when he says that 'art' is 'that for which there admittedly are rules, but the combinatory application of these rules cannot in turn be rule-bound', on pain of a regress of rules for rules (from the secular 'Allgemeine Hermeneutik' ('General Hermeneutics') of 1809–10, in Schleiermacher 1998: 229). This echoes Kant's remarks on judgement as requiring a 'talent' for being able to decide which rule should apply in a particular case. Brandom characterizes what he terms 'Wittgenstein's Regress Argument', which is much the same as Kant's, as follows: 'The rule [of language] says how to do one thing correctly only on the assumption that one can do something else correctly, namely apply the rule' (Brandom 1994: 21).

Kant argued that art could not be produced just by the following of rules, and that 'genius' is that via which 'nature gives the rule to art'. Schleiermacher, in the wake of Aristotle, thinks this means that the same issues apply to our everyday understanding of language as to art. It is only through practical training and experience that we can develop our capacity for understanding, and this is analogous to what we do in producing and receiving art. He sees production as just a less active version of reception, in a characteristic version of the Romantic questioning of a division between spontaneity and receptivity, in which the latter always involves some degree of activity. If we think in

terms of the complexity of what goes on in real examples of everyday communication, where background factors that do not appear in what is actually said, the ability to make sense of utterances that may be logically incoherent, attention to the rhythm of conversational exchange, the awareness of tone and mood, gestures, etc., are often crucial to successful understanding and interaction, the idea of this as an 'art' that transcends the application of rules makes considerable sense.

Schleiermacher's position does not, then, entail a questionable inflation of the scope of the significance of art, or of the human capacity to make sense. He also insists that language has an objective 'grammatical' aspect which means we are constrained by it, rather than it being wholly under our control. His core philosophical point is anti-foundational, and chimes with the way aesthetics emerges historically along with a sense that epistemology is incapable of providing a definitive response to the sceptic. For Schleiermacher, the 'completion' of *episteme* is 'coming to an understanding', which is 'an art *techne*'. It is 'an activity' and *episteme* and *techne* 'are the same […] both expressions are only specific ways in which what is designated by *thinking* occurs in reality in a temporal manner' (Schleiermacher 1942: 480–81). Instead of establishing a philosophical account of what grounds knowledge, such as sense-data, or an account of the transcendental structures of cognition, 'the art of finding principles of knowledge can be none other than our art of carrying on conversation' (p. 77).

The point has been echoed in contemporary philosophy by Jürgen Habermas: the establishing of 'principles of knowledge' itself cannot be excluded from the processes of intersubjective validation that take place in communicative action. As such, one either takes the sceptical route generated by the empiricist assumption of a gap between words and things, or one engages in the ever-ongoing critical dialogue required to arrive at better accounts of the world and more successful forms of social interaction. Schleiermacher adumbrates a proto-pragmatist conception which seeks to circumvent the dilemmas posed by trying to articulate the absolute in philosophy: 'Only the absolute as it never appears for itself in consciousness and the contentless idea of mere matter are free of all relativity. The subtractive procedure of excluding everything from the domain of knowledge that is tinged with relativity would permit no real knowledge at all' (Schleiermacher 1942: 230). We must therefore 'be satisfied with arbitrary beginnings in all areas of knowledge' (p. 35).

Given the notion we saw in some areas of German Idealism, particularly in relation to Jacobi's ideas, that scepticism is a deep threat to our relationship to the world, the idea of being 'satisfied with arbitrary beginnings' in knowledge

might seem strange, especially coming from someone like Schleiermacher, who was also influenced by Jacobi. The fact that German Idealism paid remarkably little detailed attention to the role of language in philosophy is significant here. Karl Leonhard Reinhold's judgement in 1812 on the classical period of German philosophy sums this up:

> In regard to these discussions about the possibility of philosophy as science, which have distinguished this period in the history of philosophy, it is an undeniable, though hardly noted fact […] that the relation of thinking to speaking and the character of linguistic usage in philosophizing in no way came under scrutiny and to formulation.
>
> (Cited in Bauer and Dahlstrom 1999: 62)

Schleiermacher (in the wake of Herder and Hamann, and together with his friend Friedrich Schlegel) develops a hermeneutic approach to philosophy that takes on board the idea that the very status of language as mediating inner and outer, and as 'aesthetic' and 'logical', means that the attempt to establish philosophy from a first principle is misconceived.

If language and the world, understood as the context of intelligibility rather than the totality of facts (see Chapter 6), are not seen as separable, only communicative action can serve as the means for arriving at truth, there being no extra-communicative means that would provide a final ground for this process. To attempt to explicate in philosophy all the conditions for successful communication would itself result in further regresses, and this is also part of what Schleiermacher means when he terms what is involved in understanding an 'art'. It is not that resources for grasping the world are lacking, and, in some of the physical sciences, the capacity to isolate phenomena and theorize them enables unparalleled accuracy and reliability. However, these sciences cannot then be used as the basis for understanding all of what happens in communication. As Schleiermacher, presaging Cassirer's view summarized above, suggests:

> Language never begins to form itself through science, but via general communication/exchange [*Verkehr*]; science comes to this only later, and only brings an expansion, not a new creation, in language. As science often takes the direction of beginning from the beginning, it must choose new expressions for new thoughts. Forming new root words would be of no help because these would in turn have to be explained by already existing ones.
>
> (Schleiermacher 1942: 511)

The sense that Cassirer explores has already to be in place before explanation gets under way, so the real question becomes how the sense made by the sciences relates to the prior meanings on which they depend. The separating out of a specific concern with the aesthetic in the eighteenth century relates in this respect to the regularization of scientific forms of exploration, which gives rise to concern with what these forms may neglect.

Bolstered by the growing professionalization and institutionalization of the natural sciences in the period following Schleiermacher, the idea arises that, whereas scientific cognition's justification was demonstrated by its ever-expanding technical application, the status of truth in the 'human sciences' was no longer methodologically secure. Oppositions between 'explanation' and 'understanding', or Wilhelm Windelband's 'nomothetic' (concerned with general laws) and 'idiographic' (concerned with understanding particular cultural phenomena) sciences, are expressions of this notional split. Wilhelm Dilthey and others consequently try to establish specific methods for the *Geisteswissenschaften* (literally, 'sciences of spirit, which English terms the 'human sciences'), which are summed up in the dictum: 'We explain nature, we understand the life of the soul' (Dilthey 1981: 144), because 'only what the mind has created does it understand' (p. 180). But this approach falls down for reasons we have already observed. The mind does not create, in the sense of 'intentionally produce', the language via which it understands itself, the language which is also required for explaining nature. Language, in one sense at least, comes from 'outside', and as we saw in Cassirer, the very sense of inside and outside itself is in part constituted by symbolic forms. I will return to Dilthey in Chapter 6.

What characterizes the most significant hermeneutic thinking in the perspective I am developing is the refusal to accept that the realm established by scientific cognition could be the key to all other kinds of meaning, or that there is a radical separation between explanation and understanding. As Heidegger puts it in *Being and Time*: 'mathematics is not stricter than history, but only more narrow with regard to the extent of the existential foundations which are relevant for it' (Heidegger 1979: 153). The existential foundations are constituted by the mode of investigation in a particular discipline, which is in turn constituted through language *qua* social communicative practice, rather than being a 'given'. That was the point of Cassirer's tracing the genesis of modern forms of objectivity. Most fundamentally—and this is, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the crux of the early Heidegger's 'existential hermeneutics'—without first having understood the world of nature as being something that demands explanation in objective terms, explanation has no basis. Things

have to show up as posing certain kinds of question before they can be brought into the language-game of explanation. The real point, then, as Cassirer shows, are the differing forms in which sense is made of the world, and how they relate to each other, rather than the priority of one particular form.

It might appear so far that widening the scope of the linguistic in order to show the links between language and art obscures what distinguishes the specifically linguistic from, say, the type of signal to which animals can also respond.[9] Taylor's response to this issue draws on Herder's notion of *Besonnenheit*, 'reflection', in his *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1770):

> Language comes about as a new, 'reflective' stance toward things. It arises among our earlier nonlinguistic stances toward objects of desire, or of fear, or to things which figure as obstacles, supports, and the like. Our stances to these things are literally bodily attitudes or actions on or toward objects. The new stance can't be in its origins entirely unconnected with bodily posture or action. But it can't be an action just like the others, whose point is definable outside the linguistic dimension. (Taylor 2016: 30)

He then makes it clear why the linguistic is so closely connected to the aesthetic:

> We can't explain language by the function it plays within a pre- or extralinguistically conceived framework of human life, because language through constituting the semantic dimension transforms any such framework, giving us new feelings, new desires, new goals, new relationships, and introduces a dimension of strong value. Language can only be explained through a radical discontinuity with the extralinguistic. (Taylor 2016: 33)

With respect to both to language and art a designative approach assumes a given, already constituted world, the pre-existing, non-human world of the modern physical sciences. The hermeneutic approach, in contrast, assumes that the world, *qua* context of meanings, inherently involves novelty. New relations to things, new emotions, new forms of expression, verbal and non-verbal, are brought about in and by language, including the production of the new science that reveals the laws governing the pre-existing non-human world.

[9] For a critical appraisal of this thorny issue (Taylor might be accused of 'speciesism', because some animals may share some of the linguistic capacity), see Michael Forster's excellent review: https://ndpr.nd.edu/reviews/the-language-animal-the-full-shape-of-the-human-linguistic-capacity/?fbclid=IwAR1IE6QMdVNZ5tDzWvf51nFsrEOOL2Dqe3UvxokWNtrM9pN53kchWisVY-w

The awareness of this new idea of language, which Taylor sees as first articulated by Herder, is inseparable from aesthetic issues. This is suggested by the fact that innovation becomes central to art in modernity. In the period from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, Western music, for example, develops and changes with remarkable rapidity, responding to transformations in people's affective lives, their relationships to non-human nature, the speed of social mobility, technical development of instruments, and the hopes and anxieties produced by the new, increasingly secularized bourgeois world. One way of seeing why music develops so rapidly has to do with the fact that the material of verbal language remains relatively static in the same kind of time frame as music changes so radically. Cassirer suggests with respect to *Darstellung*, 'representation', in language:

> Just as we do not grasp the note or sound and its sensuous modifications, but what we 'notice' in the linguistic sign is the meaning it communicates to us—in the same way the single appearance loses its independence, its self-sufficiency, its individual concretion as soon as it functions as a sign for a 'thing', for something intended objectively and objectively formed.
>
> (Cassirer 1994: vol. iii, p. 180)

However, this process, through which the meaning investigated by semantics becomes possible, can obscure other forms of apprehension, both of language and of the rest of the world, that can be vital sources of meaning. The Romantic elevation of poetry and music can, in these terms—even as poetry and music do demand the individual sensuous sign recede in order to become intelligible as part of a whole—also be seen as seeking to counter what can be lost in designative understanding of language. In such forms, attention is directed to how things can also make new sense by their very sensuous particularity, be it the specific tone of Charlie Parker's saxophone or the sound of semantically meaningless words in a Kurt Schwitters Dada poem. The concern in Russian Formalism with *ostranenie*, the 'making strange' of familiar words in literary texts, is a further pointer to the idea that certain kinds of sense may be obscured once language is seen primarily in terms of being the conveyor of objective knowledge (as Taylor's remarks on the 'Cratylist' dimension of language suggested: see also Chapter 6 on Heidegger).

Schleiermacher reflects on music as 'free production in sound', and highlights the importance of musical developments in the nineteenth century in relation to the development of the sciences and of language. He asks: 'How has this direction towards free production in sound (*Ton*) been able to expand

itself to such an infinity above what is given in nature?' (Schleiermacher 1842: 392), and contrasts the historical development of musical instruments as extensions of the human voice with the lack of extensive development of new vocabulary. He sees linguistic innovation primarily in terms of new combinations of elements, thus of style, not of widespread invention of new words. He also draws consequences from Hamann's insistence that language is both 'logical' and 'aesthetic':

> If we once more consider how one so easily one-sidedly presupposes that the very direction of the individual towards communication is a verbal one [*eine logische*, with the sense of *logos*], and yet must admit that all musical representation only really has a minimum of verbal content, then a powerful refutation of this assertion lies in this fact, and it follows that there must be a massive intensity in this direction of the human mind to be able to represent itself purely in its mobility, apart from everything verbal [*abgesehen von allem Logischen*]. (Schleiermacher 1842: 399–400)

The idea of the mind 'representing itself in its mobility' might sound formalist and self-referential, but remembering the sense that 'emotions' (what Martha Nussbaum has termed 'upheavals of thought') are precisely part of this mobility, and are central to many aspects of how we understand ourselves and the world, should dispel this impression. It is the need for ways of making sense of the potentially chaotic nature of the affective constitution of a rapidly changing world that seems to lie at the heart of the new importance of the non-designative language of music in modernity.

Even where we '"notice" in the linguistic sign […] the meaning it communicates to us', identifying different cases of the same meaning by relating differing 'single appearances', there can be a something essentially lacking in our understanding. Sometimes the sense of key words that may orient us in the world has to become 'embodied'. Just knowing what a word means *qua* piece of vocabulary may remain abstract, so that the word has no effect on the ways we are in the world. Iris Murdoch suggests: 'There are two senses of "knowing what a word means", one connected with ordinary language and the other very much less so. Knowledge of a value concept is something to be understood, as it were, in depth, and not in terms of switching on to some given impersonal network' (Murdoch 2014: 28). We can all come up with some sort of description of the meaning of terms like, for example, 'acceptance' or 'forebearance', but having to 'enact' that meaning in the face of real circumstances may reveal to us that we hadn't grasped what the word can convey. It is only

by the word becoming connected to other embodied words, and to other affective dispositions, in a way which makes it click for the individual that it can have the force to affect how we behave in relation to fundamental issues in our lives. If this kind of meaning is ignored, we fail to grasp something essential about the aesthetic dimensions of language.

## Literature

The incorporation of new terms into what makes sense of our world is often not dependent on argument or description. When such terms form part of an aesthetic text, which shows them 'in action', rather than seeking to define them, the possibility of making such sense is greater. Proust, for instance, reveals 'love' as a constant play of desire, jealousy, attraction, and repulsion in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and the mobility of what love may signify becomes part of its meaning, in a way which a classifying theoretical description might not. Reading Proust's novel reveals how understanding such words involves a dynamic process that has to be enacted for adequate understanding to be possible. Habermas, Taylor, and others suggest the analogies of this enactment to the enacting of rituals, which, described from the 'outside', may appear senseless, but which make sense when enacted in a social context.

The issues here can be construed in terms of the emergence of 'literature' in modernity. Evidently a concern with style, construction, form has in differing ways been a perennial part of thinking about and producing texts of all kinds. But a conception of forms of language which initiate new ways of seeing things only really becomes possible when language itself comes into question in the ways we have seen. The divergencies of philosophical approach to language we have been considering take on a particularly radical form from the time of the early German Romantics onwards. Designative approaches attempt to establish a relationship between words, concepts, and things that will secure claims to knowledge against sceptical attacks. A constitutive approach can also seek to account for objectivity, as we have seen in Cassirer, but when the issue of 'literature' in the sense being considered here emerges, it can also move in almost the opposite direction.

One key aspect of what I mean by the 'literary' can be precisely that it resists attempts to establish stable meanings. In the famous *Athenaeum* Fragment 116, Friedrich Schegel suggests the transformation of the idea of language that is linked to the idea of literature at issue here. Other forms of literature

> are completed and can now be completely dissected. Romantic literature [*Poesie*, in the sense of 'creative language'] is still in a state of becoming, indeed that is its real essence, that it can eternally only become, never be completed. It can never be exhausted by any theory […] Romantic literature is the only literature which is more than a genre [*Art*], and, so to speak is the art of poetry [*Dichtkunst*] itself: for in a certain sense all literature is, or should be romantic. (Schlegel 1988: vol. ii, p. 115)

As opposed to the sceptical fear that words and things may fall apart, the Romantic focus is on the perennial possibility of language disclosing the world in new ways, precisely *because* language and the world do not mirror each other in a one-to-one 'representational' relationship. Instead there is in literature an 'infinite row of mirrors' (Schlegel 1988: vol. ii, p. 115) that multiplies how things can make sense. This contrast is decisive in terms of the aims of modern philosophy.

Natural scientific theorizing seeks to articulate the natural world by establishing a greater determinacy of natural phenomena and their relations to each other. When there are two or more conflicting interpretations, such as those which see light in terms of waves or of particles, the aim is to resolve the conflict in a more encompassing theory. Analogously, in many versions of analytical semantics the aim is to establish the fundamental elements of meaning which it is assumed are necessary for such theorizing. Michael Dummett, for example, thinks a 'full-blooded theory of meaning', which he sees as having 'objective' status, needs to give 'an explicit account, not only of what anyone must know in order to know the meaning of any given expression, but of what constitutes having such knowledge' (Dummett 1993: 22). In the wake of Schleiermacher, Beate Rössler maintains, however, that, in terms of Dummett's theory:

> even for the understanding of a relatively uncomplicated sentence one could put together an indefinite list of necessary preconditions of understanding; […] on the other hand such a list, even if it could be brought to a conclusion, would lead into an infinite regress. (Rössler 1990: 140)

Something related occurs in Kripke's interpretation of Wittgenstein on meaning and rule-following, where past events do not permit warranted inference to future events: 'no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule' (Wittgenstein 1984: §201). Once again the same sceptical tropes keep recurring with

respect to accounting for meaning in theoretical terms. The question is what consequences follow from this.

The concern with indeterminacy of meaning and the regresses that occur in this context can be read in a counter-direction in the context of early German Romantic thinking. The difference is that the philosophy the Romantics enact does not primarily assume there is a need for an account of how meaning can be explained in philosophy, in order to answer the sceptic. The primary aim, in the wake of Hamann and Herder, and presaging aspects of Heidegger and others, is to explore the genesis and proliferation of sense, once the idea of a pre-given world order no longer prevails. The Romantics work in terms of the idea of meaning as an 'endless journey', in contrast to the assumption that the goal of establishing meaning can be achieved in the kind of theory exemplified by Dummett. In this sense, the constitutive view can be seen as best manifested, not by a theoretical characterization, but rather in the interpretative life of a literary text, whose meaning does not reside in any particular interpretation, but in the movement of interpretations in differing historical and social contexts. Gadamer has referred to one version of this idea as the 'fusion of horizons' between texts and interpreters at differing times.

We here encounter an important way of understanding sources of divisions between European and analytical philosophy, which emphasizes the role aesthetic considerations play in that division. Once the mathematical sciences begin to provide large-scale, technologically useable accounts of nature, analysis of the process whereby this becomes possible is always going to be secondary. This puts philosophy in a subordinate or defensive role that is highlighted in contemporary culture by the claims of Stephen Hawking and others about the irrelevance of philosophy. But the practical certainties provided by the sciences are located in a world where the aims which those certainties enable us to achieve become endlessly disputed. At that point, considerations of the sense which our technical knowledge can make of the world become paramount, but that knowledge cannot itself be used to resolve disputes over such sense. It is in this respect that forms of language which work against 'closure' start to take on a new significance.

Lack of stable signification means that philosophy becomes concerned with language as what discloses the world as a context of sense, where it is the relations between the differing kinds of sense that are decisive. In this perspective, objectification of language cannot constitute the final word, not least because language itself is required to articulate such objectification. Instead, the concern is to come to terms with the very mutability of both language and the world, without invoking an extra-linguistic foundation for such

understanding. In *On the Way to Language*, for example, Heidegger considers a Stefan George poem which includes the line: 'No thing shall be where the word is lacking'. He observes that 'language itself has from afar and fleetingly touched us with its essence' (Heidegger 1959: 161), precisely when the existing repertoire of words cannot offer the right word to disclose the thing which concerns us. Mikhail Bakhtin, as we saw, characterizes the novel as a 'polyphonic' form which seeks to address the situation where a dominant voice that resolves the differences between the symbolic articulations of the world of modern individuals is no longer present. Such approaches can sustain the idea of keeping open new possibilities in the face of a world where objectifying forms increasingly (and in very many cases legitimately—to reiterate, I am not interested in global sceptical objections to well-confirmed scientific theories) become dominant.

These approaches may seem vague from the perspective of the objectifying forms, but the core contrast here is informative. Because of their focus on the proposition, attempts to arrive at analytical theories of meaning often ignore the way in which meaning is constituted in textual form, where some version of the hermeneutic idea that part and whole mutually condition each other must come into play. Building up an account of the meaning, particularly of a literary text, piecemeal, from the aggregate of its individual statements is simply not possible. It is therefore unsurprising that much analytical philosophy of language pays little attention to textuality. In hermeneutic conceptions, constitution of meaning becomes an ongoing process where new background information, changes of perspective on the text and how its elements relate, and the appearance of subsequent texts can all alter any projection of a text's meaning.

For a historian, the goal can be to arrive at as stable a truth as possible with respect to texts relating to historical events, but the goal may be regarded as a regulative idea, because its fulfilment is made unlikely or impossible by the contingencies of empirical research. In a literary text, in contrast, the experience of shifting or multiple significances can be a source both of aesthetic value and of insight into how to negotiate a world where the certainty sought by certain kinds of philosophy may be a source of dogmatic intolerance or social conflict. In Kantian terms, the aesthetic aspect of the literary involves a play of the faculties which need not have a determinate conceptual conclusion. The Romantic image of language and literature extends the aesthetic point into a reminder about the nature of language. As we have repeatedly seen, language's 'world-disclosive' capacity is always already in play before the objectification upon which the sciences depend becomes possible.

That capacity changes its significance when objectification becomes a dominant norm, and the tensions between the functions of language become manifest in the emergence of aesthetics itself from a desire to understand non-cognitive ways of making sense in a world where the cognitive has become dominant. Understanding the relationship between these functions is vital to understanding modernity.

A key issue in this respect is how the 'literary' perspective on language suggested here deals with philosophical questions concerning truth, and once again this relates to divergences between analytical and European perspectives. The idea we have been pursuing is that seeing language in relation to aesthetic issues has to do with the awareness that 'meaning' is present in all our symbolically mediated relations to the world, rather than being something which is thought of predominantly in semantic terms. The result is that sense can be generated in any form of articulation which constitutes an effective response to the world. Clearly the need to discriminate between responses that are apt and those which are not is vital here, and in an analytical perspective this means that questions about the truth of propositions tend to take pride of place. However, from a 'literary' perspective, propositional truth is not the primary consideration.

So how are we to think of forms of meaning which are vital to the sense we make of the world, but which cannot always be cashed out into propositional content? In an essay 'On the "Existential Positivity of Our Ability to be Deceived"', Mark Wrathall uses a position close to what I have suggested about the Romantic idea of a temporalized plurality of sense to examine perceptual errors. This issue is, of course, inseparable from modern scepticism. He argues against equating how we deal with the world of physics with how we deal with the world as perceived:

> It is only because we believe in a set of determinate, objective facts about the perceived world—and only because we believe that the way the world seems to us is equally objective and determinate—that it makes sense to treat the success or failure of perception as a matter of truth or falsity.
>
> (Wrathall 2011: 60)

In contrast to seeing things in terms of this belief, everyday perceptions that turn out to be misleading, like thinking one sees a deer in the forest that turns out to be a shrub, can 'help one to see perception as having not binary success conditions but of succeeding to greater or lesser degrees—one can see the

scene in better or worse ways. But it rarely makes sense to say that I perceived either truly or falsely' (Wrathall 2011: 60). In practical dealings with the world, warrantable, bivalent propositions are only one way of relating to things. One is already to some extent in an aesthetic dimension here, as suggested by the echoes of Baumgarten's *Wahrscheinliche*, which does not involve 'clear and distinct ideas', and the idea of seeing the scene 'in better or worse ways'. The claim is not that there may be no objective answer to what state of affairs actually pertains in a particular case, but that we inhabit a world where that need not be the primary consideration.

Wrathall argues, in terms that echo what we have seen concerning the aesthetic dimension, that 'deception does not show a momentary failing or accidental shortcoming in us, but rather points the way to understanding something fundamental about us, the world, and our relationship to things in the world' (2011: 60). He cites Heidegger's idea that 'perception itself is not "measured against the idea of an absolute knowledge of the world" (GA 2: H. 38)' (p. 61), but is instead an essential mode of our being in the world. Heidegger claims 'It is precisely in the unstable seeing of the "world," a seeing that flickers with our moods, that the available shows itself in its specific wordliness, which is never the same from day to day (GA 2: H. 38)' (p. 61). As Wrathall uses Merleau-Ponty (who was heavily influenced by Cassirer) to show, explaining deception via mistaken associations of a perception with memories does not account for what actually happens in deception: 'the present experience must already have "form and meaning," it must already look like something, in order to call forth just these memories as opposed to others (see PP 20–1)' (p. 67). The prior factor, then, is the always already meaningful nature of the world of perception.

Given that a final objective truth about what happens may never be achieved, and that human history is lived primarily in the world of perceptual meanings, rather than the world of truths about physical nature, a philosophical focus on perceptual meanings can be prior to one on propositional claims: 'To say that perception is meaningful through and through is to say that there is nothing experienced in perception that is absolutely and fully given in the present; everything we perceive directs us beyond itself, attunes us to anticipate further experiences' (Wrathall 2011: 68).[10] This formulation has analogies

[10] This is close to what Derrida intends with his deconstruction of the 'presence' of meaning in the signifier, which is always deferred by the dependence of the signifier on other signifiers, and by the temporality of this dependence.

to what happens in reading a literary text, where the sense of what is said consists to a significant degree in the reader having to move beyond the given assertions to establish ever more interconnections, in order to constitute the specific world of sense evoked by the text. In a claim which has echoes of Schlegel, Merleau-Ponty says: 'the world is not a sum of things which might always be called into question, but the inexhaustible reservoir from which things are taken (PP 344)' (p. 69). The ways in which things are 'taken' from this world are what make apparent the role of aesthetic thinking in such phenomenological accounts of perception.

The forming of connections between perceptions that generate new sense shows that philosophical conceptions which do not predominantly seek to explain how words represent things involve an ineliminable aesthetic aspect. Think of how a rhythm, which Schelling talks of as 'the transformation of a succession which is in itself meaningless into a significant one' (Schelling 1856–61: vol. i/5, p. 494), is experienced. The same pattern of beats can function differently and be perceived differently in differing contexts, and the best verbal characterization of it may be metaphorical. We may be able to account for this function in terms of numerical subdivisions, but that will not capture how the rhythm may be experienced, let alone its particular psychosomatic nature. The fact is that we can give indefinitely many descriptions of an aspect of the world. This can, for e.g. technological purposes, also involve the aim of seeking a definitive description; but it can also give rise to an awareness that such multiplicity may also point to a different philosophical stance towards the world: 'for any given perceptual hold on the world, we could recognize that other holds are possible, that this way of getting to grips with the world has not come to terms with everything in the world, that other ways of engaging the world might be more or less successful, or guided by different concerns' (Wrathall 2011: 70–71). One crucial way in which we are reminded of this is precisely via the experience of 'ways of seeing' in art.

As we saw, from the German Romantics onwards, the idea starts to dawn that, as Schlegel put it: 'In truth you would be distressed if the whole world, as you demand, were for once seriously to become completely comprehensible' (Schlegel 1988: vol. ii, p. 240), because the implications of this would be nihilistic, the life of spirit consisting precisely in the continual need to make new sense. It may well be that physics will at some point in the future come up with a definitive account of the physical functioning of the universe, but that will not be a definitive account of the world. What we have seen with respect to language suggests why. Philosophy which seeks definitive answers in designative

terms to 'what there really is' can easily neglect the meaningfulness we experience in engaging with aesthetic expression and innovation, and changing our 'hold on the world'. In the next chapter I want to look at how the hold on the world that is instituted by the rise of modern science and modern capitalism dominates how the world is evaluated, and how aesthetic questions can inform our understanding of the resulting modern problems of value.

# 5
# The Value of the Aesthetic

## Value Scepticism

Aesthetics is inherently associated with questions of value, but the way value is construed in philosophical discussions of aesthetics tends to be primarily at the level of the individual recipient of works of art. In this chapter I want instead to consider various approaches to how problems of value in the modern period can be understood beyond this individual level. This involves a series of interlocking perspectives relating to developments in aesthetics, art, history, philosophy, political economy, religion, and science from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards. The complex interconnections between these areas can show key relationships between forms of value and the aesthetic dimensions of modern philosophy in a different light.

Kant's view of the beautiful as symbolizing moral qualities which cannot appear in the law-bound empirical world establishes an influential connection between aesthetics and ethics. The idea that works of art can play a role in moral development becomes particularly significant around the time of the French Revolution, relating in particular to the effects of increasing social mobility and the decline of traditional forms of authority. In the wake of Kant, Schiller, in his texts on aesthetic education, suggests that the theatre can enable otherwise abstract ethical imperatives to be communicated in a concrete manner which can affect a wider public.[1] However, the actual development of art, especially in nineteenth- and twentieth-century modernism—in Baudelaire and Wagner, or Dada and surrealism, for example—cannot really be understood in terms of its relationship to individual ethical development. The questioning of norms of language and expression in modernism is an indication that those norms may be obscuring aspects of the world which need to be made manifest in new ways. This situation is these days echoed in the quite widespread sense that many forms of philosophical ethics fail to

[1] The development of the very idea of 'the public' and the 'public sphere' is connected to aesthetics: concern with taste has to do with seeking consensus on values which may unite people, or which need to be argued for in a community.

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come to terms with the reality of ethical issues, because of their concentration on what Pippin terms 'the exercise of practical reason on the model of an individual reflectively deliberating over possible courses of action' (Pippin 2008: 19), rather than on the 'sources and nature of normativity, how we have come to hold each other to certain accounts […] what goes wrong with certain ways of collectively doing so, what goes right with others' (p. 63).

The sheer difficulty of acting ethically in a systematically interconnected modern world, where the origins and consequences of one's actions become increasingly hard to interpret and control, suggests, as Adorno shows (see Bowie 2013: ch. 5), that ethical reflection needs to respond to the ways that socioeconomic life can undermine self-determination, often rendering individual moral judgement inadequate to the reality it tries to confront. The functioning of totalitarianism, where people act in such a way as to enable things to which they would in principle be opposed, because they can't see the full consequences of what they are doing, is an extreme case of what is ubiquitous in modern societies. How this situation is responded to in art may sometimes tell us more about it than discursive responses in ethics.

The challenge for modern philosophy with respect to issues of value also lies in engaging with the threat of meaninglessness in a world where values are no longer unproblematically given, because of the effects of disenchantment and secularization. If the essential questions here concern the source of any kind of meaning or value to existence at all, questions about ethics cannot be restricted to investigation of norms governing individual behaviour, and require attention to the differing ways in which sense is constituted in modernity. The relationships between the functioning of value and the aesthetic dimensions of philosophy are vital here.

Epistemological scepticism can, as we have seen, be a symptom of wider concerns about how humankind relates both to its own and to external nature. Whereas concern about epistemological scepticism is largely confined to philosophers, the same cannot be said of 'value scepticism', the sense that the modern world lacks agreed ways of grounding value—which in key respects echoes the widespread sense that aesthetic judgements are just 'subjective'. At the same time, the proliferation of scientific knowledge poses inescapable questions about what should be done with that knowledge. Its undoubted value in enabling technological solutions has to be seen in relation to the cumulative effects of some of these solutions, which makes evaluation of the products of science ever more complex. At this point the inseparability of these issues from systemic socioeconomic and political questions starts to become clear.

There is a crucial tension here, between value that is determined by systemic pressures and value that is essential to how individuals make and experience sense: as we shall see, Marx and Nietzsche offer influential responses to this tension. Modernist art in particular can be interpreted as revealing the difficulty of establishing individual ethical perspectives in the face of modern social and economic life. The frequent absence of straightforwardly moral issues from many of the most important texts by Kafka, for example, is not some kind of moral failing, but rather an aesthetic response to a world where individual ethical considerations seem powerless in the face of overwhelming social and other pressures. The very fact that modernist art makes the status of art itself problematic, rather than continuing to work within established forms of art, is the key here (see Chapter 7).

Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* (*BT*) highlights the growing existential significance of art in a historical period where the perception of value is changed by the decline of religion in the face of the modern sciences. It does so, however, as will become apparent, while taking no account of systemic socioeconomic changes. As we saw in Chapter 3, the *BT* confronts the regress of justifications that leads to the 'abyss' that is described by Jacobi. Nietzsche draws drastic philosophical consequences from his construal of what Jacobi saw in terms of 'nihilism'.[2] He asserts, in his later, self-critical reflection on the text (in the edition of 1886), that the *BT* is notable for the way 'art—and not morality—is presented as the highest task and the real metaphysical activity of mankind', and thus for its rejection of 'the moral interpretation and the moral meaningfulness of existence' which he associates with Christianity, in favour of a 'purely aesthetic interpretation and justification of the world' (Nietzsche 1980: vol. i, p. 24). The modern sciences, which belong in the 'Apollonian' world of appearance/representation, are characterized as being based on the 'unshakable belief that thought, led by the thread of causality, reaches into the deepest abysses of being and that thought is not only able to know existence, but to correct it' (p. 99). This belief, though, 'leads science over and over again to its limits, where it must turn into art'. The limits are where the principle of sufficient reason 'in any of its forms appears to suffer an exception' (p. 28), thus where the awareness arises of something that cannot be grounded. The basic thought is already there in Kant, when he ponders the highest being asking: 'I am from eternity to eternity, outside me there is nothing

[2] Nietzsche will later come up with his own characterization of nihilism, as what results from adhering to, then losing faith in, metaphysical beliefs, so that the 'highest values devalue themselves'.

without that which is only something by my will; but whence am I, then?' (Kant 1968: p. A 613, B 641).

The concern in the *BT* is, then, once again not epistemological scepticism: instead the concern is the value of knowledge if existence has no ultimate rational ground. In the *BT* Nietzsche talks of 'battles between insatiable optimistic cognition and the tragic need for art in the highest spheres of our contemporary world' (1980: vol. i, pp. 102–3). As long as the pursuit of knowledge appears to be self-justifying, as it does in certain kinds of Enlightenment thinking, Nietzsche thinks it plays the role of 'art', by which he means what gives value to existence. However, at the moment when there seems to be no final justifying ground for cognition, a different sense of art, as what justifies existence by responding to the worst things in the form of 'beautiful appearance', emerges. Nietzsche's advocacy in the *BT* of Wagner's attempted renewal of tragedy in his music dramas is a prophetic critical response to the widespread optimism at that time about moral, scientific, and technological progress, of the kind that is exemplified in the remarks by Beatrice Webb cited at the end of Chapter 1, which will be destroyed by the First World War. The *BT* does not, though, account for how the crisis of value it describes comes about at all: to understand this, one needs to consider why a massive historical shift in the perceptions and functioning of value emerges from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards.

## Value and the 'Great Transformation'

This shift in perceptions and functioning of value is linked to the idea of the 'end of philosophy' that emerges in the opposition of Feuerbach, Marx, and other 'Young Hegelians' from the 1830s onwards to what is seen as Hegel's mystification of social reality by his metaphysics of 'the real is the rational',[3] and is present in a different form in the later Nietzsche. For the Young Hegelians, this opposition is based on the idea that systematic philosophical thinking can obscure the reality of social oppression, in much the same way as established religion was seen as doing. The underlying question here is how what is happening in the socioeconomic and political world relates to the developments in metaphysics and theology that lead to Marx and Nietzsche's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' with respect to norms, and to heightened attention to aesthetic issues. This is a minefield, as the contrasts between Max Weber's

[3] For a more philosophically just assessment of Hegel on this issue, see Kervégan 2015.

'idealist' account of the rise of capitalism as grounded in the 'Protestant ethic', and Marx's 'historical materialist' account of it as grounded in the development of the commodity form and the ensuing destruction of the feudal order make clear. What seems incontestable, however, is that it is invidious to exclude historical consideration of economics and the perceptions of value it involves from issues concerning metaphysics, aesthetics, and value.

Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation*, first published in 1944, offers an instructive framework for investigating the links between cultural and economic developments, and adds a new dimension to themes we have already encountered. The book has come to renewed attention in recent attempts to understand the contemporary economic and ecological crisis. Its central concern is the economic, social, and political breakdowns which culminate in Nazism and the Second World War, but the basis of his analysis remains relevant for many current issues because it deals with fundamental aspects of modern humankind's relationship to nature. The decisive issue for Polanyi is 'the utopian endeavour of economic liberalism to set up a self-regulating market system' (Polanyi 2001: 31) from the time of the industrial revolution (*c.*1760) onwards. Liberalism raises to the level of a religious dogma the idea that market exchange should be free of political or social interference, and involves 'a mystical readiness to accept the social consequences of economic improvement, whatever they might be' (p. 35). Polanyi is referring in particular to the appalling human consequences of the Industrial Revolution in England: 'an economic earthquake which transformed within less than half a century vast masses of the inhabitants of the English countryside from settled folk into shiftless migrants' (p. 164). The change, which is systemic, rapidly spreads elsewhere, and is crucial to the changes in relationships to nature we have already considered: 'once livelihood had been organized through an interconnected set of markets, based on the profit motive and determined by competitive attitudes, man's society became an organism that was in all essential regards subservient to materially gainful purposes' (Polanyi 1966: xvi). In Pippin's terms, therefore, there is a massive transformation of the 'sources and nature of normativity'.

Polanyi underlines the fact that 'such a system is an institutional structure which, as we all too easily forget, has been present at no time except our own, and even then it was only partially present' (2001: 40). What is at issue is a transformation of the status of forms of social exchange and activity, which in turn changes the very nature of objects and of ideas of value. In the transformation:

> All transactions are turned into money transactions, and these in turn require that a medium of exchange be introduced into every articulation of industrial life. All incomes must derive from the sale of something or other, and whatever the actual source of a person's income, it must be regarded as resulting from sale. (Polanyi 2001: 44)

Polanyi is at pains to stress just how fundamental the change really is, in a society whose main propensity becomes, as Adam Smith puts it, to 'barter, truck, and exchange'. Smith and a host of other economists, both then and now, regard this propensity as inherent in most societies in history, but Polanyi and David Graeber (2011: ch. 2) show it to be unique to the modern period, and, most importantly in our context, stress how it affects the whole of cultural life:

> For while up to Adam Smith's time that propensity had hardly shown up on a considerable scale in the life of any observed community, and had remained, at best, a subordinate feature of economic life, a hundred years later an industrial system was in full swing over the major part of the planet which, practically and theoretically, implied that the human race was swayed in all its economic activities, if not also in its political, intellectual, and spiritual pursuits, by that one particular propensity. (Polanyi 2001: 45)

Graeber points out that the constitution of value that comes to dominate in the great transformation depends on systematic quantification of a fundamental aspect of the ethical:

> What is the difference between a mere obligation, a sense that one ought to behave in a certain way, or even that one owes something to someone, and a *debt*, properly speaking? The answer is simple: money. The difference between a debt and an obligation is that a debt can be precisely quantified. This requires money. (Graeber 2011: 424)

He shows that the idea that money arises as a way of quantifying barter has no basis in history or anthropology. However, 'the Myth of Barter cannot go away, because it is central to the entire discourse of economics' (p. 865), which excludes other forms of social relationship in which people interact and communicate with each other over how to evaluate and exchange things.

It is, therefore, precisely in the period in which the changes in the relationship to nature occasioned by the modern sciences, new questions about language, and modern aesthetics emerge, that the very idea of an 'economy' also comes into existence for the first time, with Adam Smith. Polanyi claims that in the great transformation: 'Instead of economy being embedded in social relations, social relations are embedded in the economic system' (Polanyi 2001: 60), so that 'the change from regulated to self-regulating markets at the end of the eighteenth century represented a complete transformation in the structure of society' (p. 74). He stresses the deep cultural effects of the transformation, in which 'labour, land, and money' all become commodities, even though 'The commodity description of labor, land, and money is entirely fictitious' (ibid. p. 75), because neither labour, nor land, nor money is produced for sale. The rise of the idea of the intrinsic value of natural beauty is one response to this transformation, as is the crystallization of the idea of the autonomous value of art, which is, though, accompanied and in part occasioned by the increasing commodification of art.

Polanyi paints an apocalyptic vision of the potential social and cultural effects of any total realization of the transformation:

> To allow the market mechanism to be sole director of the fate of human beings and their natural environment indeed, even of the amount and use of purchasing power, would result in the demolition of society. In disposing of a man's labor power the system would, incidentally, dispose of the physical, psychological, and moral entity 'man' attached to that tag. Robbed of the protective covering of cultural institutions, human beings would perish from the effects of social exposure. (Polanyi 2001: 76)

The fact that Polanyi's work has again become important in contemporary discussion of economics and culture has, then, to do with its prescience about the ongoing destructive cultural effects of unregulated capitalism. In a recent piece in the *Guardian* newspaper, Paul Mason cites political scientist Wendy Brown, whose analysis of contemporary neoliberalism echoes Polanyi's analysis of emergence of the market mechanism:

> It is not, argues Brown, that freemarket elites purposefully embrace the project of autocracy, but that the economic microstructures created in the last 30 years 'transmogrify every human domain and endeavour, including humans themselves, according to a specific image of the economic'. All action is judged as if it has an economic outcome: free speech, education,

> political participation. We learn implicitly to weigh what should be principles as if they were commodities.
>
> (https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/jul/31/democracy-dying-people-worried-putin-erdogan-trump-world)

How, then, is a world dominated by commodification to be responded to in art, and what does this tell us about philosophy? As should be clear from what we have just seen, these issues remain as live as they were when Polanyi wrote *The Great Transformation*.

Polanyi argues that the wholesale realization of the great transformation—which now seems closer than ever—would mean that 'Nature would be reduced to its elements, neighborhoods and landscapes defiled, rivers polluted, military safety jeopardized, the power to produce food and raw materials destroyed' (Polanyi 2001: 76). The effects of the great transformation on ethics conceived in terms of the individual making self-determined moral decisions are clearly enormous. If the very nature of humankind's relations to others and to nature is quantified in a systematic new way, whose coming into being cannot be understood in individual terms, value cannot just be understood in the terms that prevailed before this change. Adorno suggests: 'It is […] no coincidence that theory of society in an emphatic sense only arose with the industrial revolution and with emerging economic liberalism' (Adorno 2008: 44), and he sees the development of modernist art as a response to how what Polanyi analyses renders existing forms of sense-making questionable. Interpretations of this situation are legion in modern thought, such as Habermas's contrast between 'system', which refers, in the wake of Max Weber, to modern science and bureaucracy, and 'life-world', the world in which individual sense is made. The analogies between quantification in modern science and in the economic sphere suggest the constitutive ambivalence inherent in quantification, which, it has always to be remembered, brings massive benefits and yet, as its impact becomes ubiquitous, can also produce disaster.

Pippin talks about 'the modern layout of the problem, the hard-to-pin-down but pervasive sense of the "wrongness" of society' (Pippin 2011) that is responded to in aesthetic modernism. The move away from God-given and other traditional orders both emancipates possibilities, including aesthetic ones, for creating new kinds of order (while also creating conflicts between them) and gives rise to the imposition of a quantified economic and scientific order on a world that is now widely seen as ultimately purposeless. This suggests another reason why a scepticism based on the idea of the split

between subject and object emerges with the rise of modern science and the commodification of nature. If the new order has to be imposed, rather than, as order is in feudalism, regarded as naturally or divinely given, it can be seen as coming solely from the side of the subject, and this puts the subject itself and its relationship to the world into question in the ways we have been considering (this issue will be further explored in relation to Heidegger in Chapter 6).

Questioning of the nature of the subject is reflected in the drive for innovation that characterizes aesthetic modernism: this militates against any canonical order, in the name of keeping new responses to the world open—think of Baudelaire's desire in 'Le voyage' to: 'Plonger […] Au fond de l'Inconnu pour trouver du *nouveau*!' ['Dive […] to the depths of the Unknown to find something *new*'] (Baudelaire n.d.: loc. 1208). Issues of value, both ethical and aesthetic, change radically, because the new prior structuring principle of value instituted by the commodity system alters individual perceptions of value and gives rise to political and aesthetic forms of opposition to that order. What is at stake here is also the very status of 'nature', which, in the terms proposed by Heidegger from the 1930s onwards, threatens to become just a 'standing reserve' to be used for technological and commercial ends. And, in Adorno's Schelling- and Marx-influenced terms, the market mechanism adds to the compulsions of socially produced 'second nature'. This can threaten human well-being in ways that are analogous to how 'first' nature threatens us (see Bowie 2013: ch. 5, and Chapter 7 below).

## Myth, Religion, and Art

The dominance of the market mechanism is, then, a determining part of processes of secularization in the West which give rise to new questions concerning how sense is to be made in the face of disenchantment. The later Nietzsche's core idea is, however, that, despite the 'death of God', humankind has actually continued to live in the shadow of God's existence, and still has to face the challenge of how to live without relying on surreptitiously theological means of making sense (Nietzsche 1980: vol. iii, p. 467). As we shall see later, Nietzsche's aim of living free of all forms of meaning and value that relate to religion will turn out to be highly questionable. So how does the aesthetic relate to the religious in this context, given the obvious fact that secularization has only ever been partial? Discussing the future role of religion, Habermas argues: 'Religious traditions ["*Überlieferungen*"] still provide the articulation

of what is lacking. They keep alive a sensibility for what people have been denied' (Habermas 2005: 13). In the context of the broader implications of the great transformation, the sensibility for what is lacking is a response both to the dominance and effects of the market mechanism and to the disenchanting effects of the sciences.

Habermas considers the limitations of philosophy with respect to religion's expression of what may be lacking, and links this to aesthetics:

> At best [philosophy] *circles around* the opaque core of religious experience, when it reflects on the particular nature of religious discourse and the stubbornness of belief. But this core remains as profoundly alien to discursive thought as the core of aesthetic reflection, which is also only circled around, but not penetrated by philosophical reflection. (Habermas 2005: 150)

And 'With the concepts of the beautiful, of the ugly, of the sublime, philosophy achieves little more than a cautious encircling of that speechless-sensuous arousal which is mobilized by the play of reflective judgement' (pp. 251–2). The sense made by art cannot, then, be objectified in the perspective of an observer. Without participation in the source of this kind of sense, that occurs in the play of aesthetic experience, it does not exist. The exclusion of certain ways of evaluating things inherent in aspects of observation-based scientific inquiry, and in the objectifying effects of the market, contrasts sharply with the relations to things that Habermas sees as present in religious and aesthetic experience.

The connections between the content of these kinds of experience was an issue in Hegel's view of art, where it depended on how the sensuous world is transformed by *Geist* in religion, art, science, and philosophy. A related concern is present in Marx's famous incomplete reflections, in the Introduction to the *Grundrisse*, on the continuing appeal of Greek art in the age of modern capitalism. Marx focuses on the mismatch between the development of the means of production of material goods, and 'artistic production', where the quality of the latter can be higher in a society with less developed forms of material production. He asks: 'What happens to Vulcan in relation to Roberts and Co., Jupiter in relation to the lightning conductor, and Hermes in relation to the Crédit Mobilier?' (Marx 1974: 44–5). Marx sees mythology and religion merely as imaginary forms of control of nature, in contrast to modern technologies of production, exchange, and communication: 'All mythology overcomes, and dominates, and forms the forces of nature in the imagination and by the imagination; therefore disappears with real domination of those

forces.' Greek art 'presupposes Greek mythology: i.e. nature and social forms themselves already processed in an unconsciously artistic manner by the fantasy of the people'. He therefore asks whether the 'necessary conditions' for the production of epic poetry have not in fact disappeared with the rise of real technological and economic control.

However, he then abruptly changes the focus with respect to Greek works of art: 'The difficulty is that they still afford us artistic pleasure and count in a certain respect as a norm and as an unattainable model' (Marx 1974: 44–5). His answer to why they do this is, though, not really convincing: 'Why should the historical childhood of humankind, where it unfolds in the most beautiful manner, not exercise eternal charm, as a stage which will never return?' The fact that Greek tragedies which derive from Greek epic are still performed today, and are interpreted as articulating contemporary concerns, is, though, clearly not based on their naïve charm, but rather on their continuing capacity to reveal things about human existence.

If one considers the increased cultural significance of music in the West in Marx's period, one can tell a more plausible story about the relationship between mythology, technical command, and aesthetic expression. This story, as we will see in a moment, is linked to mythology in one of the key musical works of the period. Some of the power of music relates to the way it can retrieve and make new sense of affective and other responses to the world which are repressed in the course of socialization: rhythm is, for example, an aspect of its ability to do this (see Bowie 2007: ch. 3). In face of the pressures of modern societies, for this meaning-retrieval to succeed, art actually requires technical development, if what is repressed is to sustain its affective and other value, and music, particularly from Bach onwards, changes with remarkable rapidity.

Marx's assumption about economic and technological command of the object underestimates what that command represses, which is precisely what art can still seek to express via a different kind of command. Wagner's use of mythology in combination with technically very advanced new music in *The Ring of the Nibelung* emerges at much the same time as Marx is reflecting on mythology's decline. The enduring cultural impact of the *Ring*—which Patrice Chéreau interpreted in his renowned centenary Bayreuth production of 1976 as precisely a reflection on the effects of capitalism in Wagner's period—suggests, as did Nietzsche in the *BT*, that there are dimensions of sense relating to mythology which are not based on imaginary command of nature and which are sustained in art.[4]

[4] George Bernard Shaw in *The Perfect Wagnerite* already pointed out the close connections between Marx's *Capital* and *The Ring*.

When Marx himself characterizes religion, in the famous remarks in *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, as the 'opium of the people', and 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions', he himself points to an alternative conception. Mythology, religion, and music are symbolic forms, which can imbue the world with value that deeply affects people's conduct of their lives, especially when their material conditions lack such value. Marx's aim is, of course, the real transformation of material conditions, as a means of making the world less heartless, and mythology can very easily take on questionable ideological forms that prevent this. However, Habermas's claim that religion and art can still offer resources that lead to expression or articulation of 'what is lacking' suggests that overcoming material need does not obviate the needs responded to in art: this seems particularly apposite with respect to the growth in the importance of music in the period of the great transformation.

Religious sense may, as Habermas contends, be generated by participation in collective ritual, rather than by doctrine expressed in discursive form. Ritual can become merely dogmatic and objectified, and is easily misused for reactionary purposes, but in the period of the great transformation, religious rituals are transformed into some of the greatest music ever composed, as the masses by Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, and others show. The perception of the centrality of music in relation to such ritual forms grows from the second half of the eighteenth century onwards, as religious conviction weakens. These works offer responses to inescapable aspects of human existence, in which the interaction of music and text transcends the theological aspect of the texts. A secular listener can experience dimensions of sense in such works that elude discursive articulation, and the works themselves would not have been possible without the technical innovations characteristic of the most important modern music. As such, especially in the case of Bach's *B Minor Mass*, and Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, the great works of this period can be said to count, in Marx's words, 'in a certain respect as a norm and as an unattainable model'. The musical tradition to which they belong achieved something which, from a contemporary perspective, seems unlikely to be surpassed, and which still remains completely alive.

## Reification and Metaphysics

It is not, however, that art itself is immune to the objectifying effect of the great transformation. This is most obvious in the case of 'fine art', where individual art objects can become hugely expensive commodities. The revolt

against convention in modernism is one response to this, and the avant-garde is faced with the problem of how to escape being co-opted into a market which appropriates existing forms of art and diminishes their potential for making new sense. Art can, then, be revalorized as a critical response to systemic changes in relations to the world, but can also become linked to ideology and distract from confronting social reality: the enduringly controversial reception of the works of Wagner reflects this tension.

Marx's aim is to demystify what society has become when the world is dominated by commodification, including of art: 'The mysteriousness of the commodity form simply consists in the fact that it reflects back to people the social character of their own work as the objective character of the products of labour themselves, as social natural attributes of these things' (Marx and Engels n.d.: locs 1919–21). A different ordering of human production and exchange would, for Marx, enable a fundamental transformation of relationships to nature and other people. His analysis of these issues raises wider questions about the functioning of identity in modernity which have considerable effects on subsequent thinking about value and aesthetics.

Anything, including human labour itself, that becomes a commodity is potentially identical, *qua* exchange value, to any other thing. A commodity's value is determined by a thing's relations to other commodities, not by anything intrinsic to itself. Adorno and others in the Marxist tradition contend that things gaining their value in terms of their relations to other things in a system that comes to span the world is the echo in the socioeconomic world of the kind of all-encompassing systematic metaphysics represented by Spinoza and Hegel. Identification takes place in terms of things' relations in a system to what they are not. In the name of a Procrustean universalism, such metaphysics can obscure the singularity and unique value of things and people, in a way related to how the commodity form can erase particularity and distort social relations.

The links between metaphysics and Marx's analysis of the commodity form are developed by Georg Lukács in his influential essay on 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat' in *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), where he stresses the connection between the economic and the cultural changes we have been examining. Here Marx's concern with how relationships between people become like relationships between things is seen as part of a more general phenomenon of 'reification', that echoes Polanyi's fears about the effects of the domination of the market mechanism. Lukács, whose thought is also informed by German Idealism and early Romanticism, claims that 'the primal image of all forms of objectivity can be found in the structure of the

commodity relation and all forms of subjectivity that correspond to those forms in bourgeois society' (Lukács 1923: 97). Axel Honneth argues that Lukács

> [asserts] with Marx on the very first page of his treatise that reification signifies nothing but the fact that 'a relation between people has taken on the character of a thing.' In this elementary form, the concept clearly designates a cognitive occurrence in which something that does not possess thing-like characteristics in itself (e.g., something human) comes to be regarded as a thing. (Honneth 2005: 96)

Honneth thinks that Lukács's account of reification needs differentiation, because not all forms of objectification need be socially damaging. He makes the link between the economic and the cultural that is at issue in this chapter, and asks: 'How can one explain what reification means outside of the sphere of commodity exchange, if this concept solely denotes an occurrence in which all elements of a social situation are redefined as economically calculable factors?' (p. 98).

Honneth shows that Lukács himself offers the means to expand the reach of the term, when he focuses on how reification turns participatory modes of engagement with the world into detached, observational modes. This is not 'a mere epistemic category mistake' (p. 99): rather, 'this shift in attitude reaches far too deep into our habits and modes of behavior for it to be able to be simply reversed by making a corresponding cognitive correction'. Once again the epistemological perspective fails to articulate key aspects of the historical change. Honneth contends: 'The detached, neutrally observing mode of behavior, which Lukács attempts to conceptualize as "reification," must form an ensemble of habits and attitudes that deviates from a more genuine or better form of human praxis' (p. 100). Awareness of reification relies on the notion of 'true human praxis' that is obstructed by systemic forms of social and economic exchange. This suggests the connection to aesthetics, which will preoccupy Lukács for much of his career. Without means of opening up new ways of seeing—both literal and metaphorical—the danger is that reified modes of behaviour and action will perpetuate a status quo which Lukács associates with the most disastrous ideological effects of the great transformation: 'Every soberly judging person must, since world war and world revolution, hold in appalling memory the complete incapacity of all bourgeois thinkers and historians to comprehend world-historical events of the present as world-history' (Lukács 1923: 152).

Lukács adopts a metaphor from Ernst Bloch on 'how nature becomes landscape', as opposed to 'the unconscious "living-in-nature", for example, of the farmer' (1923: 153) to suggest the way the subject–object relationship becomes reified. Nature can only become landscape for an observer standing 'outside the landscape': 'they can only have the landscape-relationship to nature as a spatially separated observer'. Lukács then maintains:

> the landscape relationship finds its appropriate and unproblematic expression in art, although it should not be forgotten that even in art the same irresolvable distance between subject and object opens up as we encounter everywhere in modern life, and that art can only mean the shaping, not the real dissolution of this problematic. (Lukács 1923: 153)

He sees what would achieve the real dissolution of the reifying subject/object division in terms of the proletariat as the revolutionary agent of the overcoming of capitalism. Clearly Lukács' solution, especially when he argues that it is through the organization of the Communist Party that the proletariat becomes this agent, has, in the light of the history of the Third International, no traction any more. However, the idea that art involves the 'shaping' of the tension between the subjective and the objective becomes more significant when a real dissolution of the tension by political action fails to occur, and reification continues to play a distorting social role. This situation is the one that Adorno and others in the Frankfurt School in particular respond to, as the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union becomes fully apparent in the 1930s, and fascism destroys other socialist alternatives. The distorting role of reification is, though, not just played out in the political sphere: forms of reification, as Lukács suggests, also play a role in philosophy.

## Art, Science, and Meanings

Many modern forms of philosophical naturalism lack ways of plausibly accounting for the meanings associated with the aesthetic dimensions. This is not least because they reify the object of aesthetics, and neglect meanings that occur through participation: Steven Pinker's remark that music is just 'auditory cheesecake' neatly sums up what is wrong here. The questions Cassirer raised about language and objectivity we considered in Chapter 4 suggest the problem for reductive naturalism. Its claims rely on the ways language is

always already meaningful as a social practice, upon which any objectifying account of the world depends. In line with Cassirer, Habermas argues:

> The life-world contexts and linguistic practices in which socialized subjects 'always already' find themselves disclose the world from the perspectives of sense-creating traditions and habits. Everything that is encountered in the world is experienced by the members of a local linguistic community in the light of a habituated 'grammatical' pre-understanding, not as neutral objects.
> (Habermas 2005: 39)

As Cassirer showed, meanings generated in the life-world can often be understood via the analogies between language and art. In Habermas's terms 'even in a descriptive use of language we cannot ignore its world-disclosing character' (2005: 39), the character language shares with art. Why, then, are these forms of meaning, particularly from the beginning of the twentieth century, often put in the shadow of conceptions in analytical philosophy which focus predominantly on the use of language to represent 'independent objects'? The gap between such approaches and the approach I am seeking to develop in this book is part of what makes the aesthetic dimensions significant for future forms of philosophy. The focus of some forms of analytical philosophy has consequences that relate to those brought about by other forms of reification in modernity. This is because the complex ways in which people relate to and communicate with each other are not best understood by thinking of language primarily in objectifying terms. As we saw when looking at Taylor's distinction between 'designative' and 'expressive' views of language, awareness of this issue emerges along with aesthetics itself as a central philosophical concern.

I want now to use some of Nietzsche's diverse criticisms of philosophy to explore more of the ramifications of reification in relation to philosophy. Many of his criticisms, as we will see, relate to aesthetic considerations, but ultimately fail to grasp the full significance of what these considerations can show. In his probably most cogent criticisms of metaphysics, Nietzsche interrogates reductionist understandings of truth in the sciences themselves, and uses art to do so. A representative passage is section 373 of *The Gay Science*, where he talks of the

> belief that so many materialist explorers of nature are content with, the belief in a world which is supposed to have its equivalent and measure in human thought, in human concepts of value, in a 'world of truth'

> which one can definitively reach with the help of our little, square-shaped human reason. (Nietzsche 1980: vol. iii, 625)

It is important to specify the scope of these remarks. Nietzsche is questioning the idea of truth as correspondence of thought to 'independent objects': he does not always question truth as a norm in communication that need not be conceived of in terms of correspondence. He also makes clear that his target is 'materialist' and 'mechanistic' science, referring, for example, to Herbert Spencer, rather than science per se. Moreover, his initial complaint is aesthetic: 'One should not want to divest [existence] of its *ambiguous* character: *good* taste demands this, gentlemen, the taste of the respect for everything which goes beyond your horizon' (p. 625).

The real basis of Nietzsche's criticism is 'perspectivism', which is concerned with the new sense an interpretation of the world can make. Mechanistically oriented scientists are 'of the opinion that mechanics is the doctrine of the first and last laws, on which, as on a foundation, all existence would have to be built up. But an essentially mechanical world would be an essentially *senseless* world!' (p. 626). Implicit in this assertion is the idea crucial to thinking about art that sense is constituted in relation to the future, as something which can augment the world, rather than being timeless and already in existence. Nietzsche's rejoinder to the idea of 'an essentially mechanical world' is based on art, and highlights one particular form of reification: 'Assuming one estimated the *value* of a piece of music according to how much of it could be counted, calculated, brought into formulae—how absurd such a "scientific" assessment of music would be!' (p. 626). The failure of the mechanistic (and monetary) view of music lies in the fact that it would have understood 'Nothing, nothing at all of what is really "music" in it.' The question is again one of sense that is not reducible to claims about 'independent objects'—'music' *qua* object independent of its interpretative production and reception by subjects is not music, but a series of physically explicable phenomena.

Habermas's remark, cited above, about the core of the aesthetic being 'profoundly alien to discursive thought', and valuable for this reason, makes the issue clear. Music is normatively constituted in historical contexts, and the norms in question cannot be circumscribed by a scientific theory.[5] This is

[5] Attempts, by Hindemith and others, to suggest that harmony in music is based on natural numerical relations between pitches have been shown by Adorno and others to fail, because of the normative and historical element in how people hear music. Attempts to explain music in psychological terms raise similar problems, because what can be observed in playing or listening subjects does not exhaust the way music is meaningful to those involved. One cannot write the history of musical reception and

because a key aspect of modern music's normativity is the creation of new sense, of the kind that motivates musical development. Such sense relies on active participation that pushes towards innovation, rather than just cementing existing norms—the development of the music in the masses by Bach and others alluded to above illustrates this well. At the same time, the natural elements of which music is composed can, of course, be conceptually articulated: the pitches, durations, etc., which constitute the physical material of music, can be identified, and, as we now know, digitally encoded, so that computers can 'make music' based on rules that regulate the material in question. The difference here is therefore one of perspective, and the question is how the differing perspectives relate.

As Alexander Nehamas shows, Nietzsche's perspectivist stance, even with respect to the objectively determinable elements with which art is made, is very radical, and it links to ideas we have already encountered. Nehamas considers Nietzsche's rejection of the idea of a 'thing in itself' in terms which connect to the relationship between systematic metaphysics and the commodity form. One key contention of Nietzsche's perspectivism is, in a formulation which is not that far from Kant's conception of an object, that 'a "thing" is a sum of its effects, synthetically connected by a concept, image' (Nietzsche 1980: vol. xiii, p. 274). Nehamas cites Nietzsche from *The Will to Power*: 'That things possess a constitution in themselves quite apart from interpretation and subjectivity, is a quite idle hypothesis; it presupposes that interpretation and subjectivity are not essential, that a thing freed from all relationships would still be a thing (WP, 560)' (cited in Nehamas 1985: 80–81). Nietzsche is, then, concerned here to intensify the sense in which what the world is is constituted in terms of endless perspectives.[6]

Nehamas associates Nietzsche's conception with Saussure's view of the linguistic sign. Saussure contends, linking the sign to money, that:

> All conventional values present the character of not being combined with the tangible element which is their support. So it is not the metal of a piece

production as a history of internal psychological events, because it also depends on the world to which music is a response.

[6] Nehamas thinks that Nietzsche's view is incoherent: 'How do we know that we are using the pronoun correctly when we say, "A thing is the sum of *its* effects"?' (Nehamas 1985: 81). I'm not sure how problematic this actually is, if one assumes, for example, that a thing can be regarded as what can be articulated by the existential quantifier. Take the case where 'there is an x, such that things burn': the x was, for the people inhabiting the pre-Lavoisier world, phlogiston, and is now oxygen, and could conceivably, if future physics and chemistry radically revise the frameworks used to explain such matters, turn out to be something else. However, even that unlikely case does not mean that what makes things burn does not exist, and, as far as the world we inhabit is concerned, its observable effects are what constitute its existence.

> of change that fixes its value [. . .] This is even more true of the linguistic signifier; in its essence it is not phonic at all, it is incorporeal, constituted, not by its material substance, but solely by the differences that separate its acoustic image from all the others. (de Saussure n.d.: locs 2282–7)

He therefore argues that 'in language there are only differences without positive terms' (ibid. Kindle Locations 2312-2313). These differences become meaningful through the shared conventions which establish their place in the system of the *langue*. Nehamas suggests that Nietzsche applies this idea of differences without positive terms to the 'whole world', as a way of undermining traditional metaphysics which seeks the intrinsic essence of things (Nehamas 1985 p. 82). For Nietzsche, things only are what they are via their effects on and relations to other things: as we have seen, the situation created by commodification can be interpreted in an analogous way.

## Language, Identity, and Value

The issue here is again how forms of identity are constituted and interpreted, and what effects those forms have on the social constitution of value. The underlying problem is already apparent in Leibniz's notion that a thing can only be identical with itself, because for x and y to be identical they would have to share all the same properties. This leads Wittgenstein and others to suggest that the notion of identity is vacuous. Remember, though, Novalis's remark, cited in Chapter 3: 'The essence of identity can only be demonstrated in an *pseudo-proposition* ("*Scheinsatz*"). We leave the *identical* in order to represent it' (Novalis 1978: 8). Nietzsche suggests something similar with respect to concepts, though he questionably sees this in terms of falsehood (the remark makes more sense if it is read as a description of what happens in commodification): 'The concept arises out of an identification of what is not identical: i.e. via an illusion/deception [*Täuschung*] that there is something identical, via the presupposition of identities: thus through false intuitions' (Nietzsche 1980: vol. vii, p. 542). Kant maintained that identity has to be a function of thought, for the reason suggested by Leibniz's view of identity—i.e. because no two empirical things are identical—but this does not mean identifications must be 'false'. Without ways of seeing some x's and y's as the same, intelligible thought is impossible, and Novalis maintains that 'we represent [the identical] by its non-being, by something non-identical—a sign' (Novalis 1978: 8). Similarly, the being of the thing in the market is expressed

by money which is not the thing, but which represents its social value. The concern behind the idea of reification is that the commodity form and reductive construals of natural science can empty the world of key forms of meaning by erasing crucial differences, both between things and between people. This reduces them to an identity which deprives them of other kinds of value.

Nietzsche suggests how this reduction connects to natural science when he rejects the notion of causality as based on laws, rules, necessity, and maintains: '*The calculability of an occurrence* […] lies in *the recurrence of identical cases*' (Nietzsche 1980: vol. xiii, p. 276). The distinction Herbert Schnädelbach makes between 'identifying with' and 'identifying as' (Schnädelbach 1987) is illuminating here. The former reduces things to how they can be made the same, as they are in the commodity form or in scientific classification. The latter, which is consistent with Nietzsche's perspectivism, leaves open the possibility that things can accrue an indeterminate number of identities, and this connects to the possibilities of changing how things are responded to that are present in art.

The suspicion we saw shared by Marx, Lukács, Adorno, and others is that systematic metaphysics is echoed in the commodity form: in both, difference is reduced to a reifying identity which can distort human relationships. A.W. Moore notes that 'the prioritization of identity over difference […] has been a characteristic of most of Western philosophy—and […] is still indeed a characteristic of most of analytic philosophy' (Moore 2012: 554). In the perspective that concerns us here, aesthetic ways of expressing and articulating the modern world become important, because they can challenge conventional, reified ways of valuing things based on 'identification with'. The emergence of modernist art is in this sense a symptom of the need to question conventional forms of value, and this can happen via works which may appear to make no sense in established terms. Once again Monk's 'Wrong is right' captures the idea.

The idea of things being constituted by their relations leads in very divergent directions. If the relations are seen as constituted in a system, the aim is to establish the identity of each element through its relations to all the other elements. In the structuralist linguistics of Saussure, elements only signify via their relations to other elements in the system of the *langue*. However, if the relations between the signifying elements are not stable—Manfred Frank (1984) analogizes strict structuralism with trying to freeze molecules to absolute zero, where all movement would cease—the value of an element will be temporalized and never finally establishable, because new contexts will mean it takes on new significances. The unstable relational view is precisely what is at issue in Nietzsche's perspectivism.

In certain pragmatist and post-structuralist conceptions, some of which are influenced by Nietzsche, words cannot possess intrinsic Fregean 'senses', because the web of language is constantly being rewoven in response to changes in our relationships to the world and to each other. In Chapter 4 we touched on Samuel Wheeler's idea of a 'magical language', a 'system of representation such that the senses and referents of that language's terms are determined by the intrinsic nature of those terms' (Wheeler 2000: 217). Wheeler reflects on the consequences of rejecting this idea:

> The firmest ground for deeming a system of concepts to be coherent is that it is tied at various points to reality, whose coherence will induce an overall coherence on the system. If essentialism were true and the meanings of terms could be presented transparently, then the coherence and order of nature would induce its stability and order in a system of concepts about nature. But if essentialism is false and no magic language exists, then any stability would need to be founded on human interactions.
>
> (Wheeler 2000: 222)

Like others in the hermeneutic tradition, Nietzsche in many respects belongs on the anti-essentialist side of this division, and the question is what human interactions he thinks found what kinds of stability.

In the great transformation, new kinds of value are instituted by interactions that result in commodification. Language also establishes relational identities, and this can mean that diversity is reduced to coercive forms of identity: issues concerning race or gender, and language, suggest the problem here. This suggests a further reason why the approaches to language we have associated with the emergence of aesthetics become so significant. Once language ceases to be seen as God-given, or in predominantly designative terms, and focus on its constitutive aspect develops, the ways it constitutes the world become inherently contested. This links language to questions of power, as happens in the case of race or gender, and identity, but also to questions about meaningfulness and value that are exemplified in new forms of art and in new ways of understanding art.

Nietzsche's advocacy of a 'transvaluation of all values' is premised precisely on tracing a history of the language of values in terms of power, and this is where the limitations of his vision become apparent. He rejects the idea that the meaning of 'good' established in Christianity has always been what defines good. Instead, it is defined by those who value what they themselves are, so excluding what they are not. What good *is* therefore changes in the history

Nietzsche characterizes in terms of the 'slave revolt in morality', i.e. the advent of Christianity, which he sees as persuading the strong to see themselves as weak. Given what he sees as the lack of any intrinsic moral content to moral terms, Nietzsche argues that the moral philosopher has to look at the history of the language of morality, where the determinacy of terms will depend precisely on their changing relations to what they are not—hence what Nietzsche presents as the inversion of the meaning of 'good' in Christianity. But the question is then what gives this 'semiotic', relational dimension its semantic content, and this is where power comes in. Nietzsche famously maintains that 'The lordly right to give names goes so far that one should allow oneself to comprehend the origin of language itself as an expression of power of the rulers: they say "that is such and such", they seal every thing and occurrence with a sound and, so to speak, take possession of it' (Nietzsche 1980: vol. v, p. 260). At this point a tension emerges between fundamentally different conceptions of identity, value, and meaning that echoes themes we have already encountered.

One side of this tension—the 'lordly right to give names'—sees meaning as grounded in power, and leads in the direction of a metaphysics of quanta of power as the determinants of identity. Superiority in power excludes other perspectives. Given what we saw above concerning connections between semiotics and money, this conception can (though Nietzsche himself, as we will see in a moment, largely ignores political economy) be related to how the commodity form functions. The commodity form becomes a means of acquiring and exercising power because it makes all objects functionally equivalent as exchange-values, and so can exclude other forms of value and meaning. The other side of the tension, in contrast, involves the possibility of an unfettered proliferation of perspectives, without a unifying ground. Such perspectives necessarily involve forms of identity, but at the same time point in the direction of art. As Nehamas shows, the second conception lies behind Nietzsche's suspicion of metaphysical notions of objective knowledge as timeless true representation of things. Nehamas cites Nietzsche: 'Our apparatus for acquiring knowledge is not *designed* for "knowledge"' (*WP*, 496)', where 'Knowledge in contrast to "knowledge," for Nietzsche involves an inherently conditional relation to its object, a relation which presupposes or manifests specific values, interests, and goals' (Nehamas 1985: 50).

The point, once again, is not that we lack contact with the world, but that there is always the possibility of different and new forms of contact with respect to anything in the world. The real philosophical difficulty lies in the evaluation of such forms. Perspectivism shows how thought necessarily

excludes and selects, in order to arrive at anything determinate: 'Some perspectives are, and can be shown to be, better than others. But a perspective that is best of all is not a perspective at all' (Nehemas 1985: 49). Nehamas connects this idea to aesthetics via the metaphor of a painter depicting something (Cassirer uses much the same example, as we saw in the last chapter): 'There is no sense in which painters, even if we limit our examples to realistic depictions of one's visual field, can ever paint "everything" that they see. […] Analogously, Nietzsche believes, there can be no total or final theory or understanding of the world' (pp. 50–51).

A pragmatist construal of this approach to rejecting a 'God's-eye view' points, as Nietzsche does, to the idea that philosophy itself has been manifested historically in a way that can be thought of in perspectivist terms. Rather than producing a definitive picture, philosophy makes manifest new perspectives that come to replace others as historical and social demands change. John Dewey suggests the image of philosophy in question:

> [T]he distinctive office, problems and subject-matter of philosophy grow out of stresses and strains in the community life in which a given form of philosophy arises, and […] accordingly, its specific problems vary with the changes in human life that are always going on and that at times constitute a crisis and a turning point in human history.
>
> (Dewey, from the 1948 introduction to reprint of *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, quoted in Bernstein 2010: 220–21)

How, then, do these ideas connect to Nietzsche's questions about the value of truth, and to aesthetics?

The questionable version of Nietzsche's approach—the one couched in terms of the 'Will to Power'—is essentially a 'final theory', where the Will to Power is the ground of intelligibility. Heidegger claims in this respect that Nietzsche is the last metaphysician, summing up the history of philosophy as metaphysics (via Aristotle, Kant, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche) by seeing it as the attempt to

> think beings as a whole, which means the being of beings has showed itself as the ground (arche, aition, principle) […] the ground has the character of grounding as the ontic causation of the real, as the transcendental making possible of the objectivity of objects, as the dialectical mediation of the movement of absolute Spirit and of the historical process of production, as the will to power positing values. (Heidegger 1988: 69–70)

In this view of Nietzsche, cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic values are posited by the same ground that would explain the essential nature of being. The connection of the idea of systematic metaphysics with the commodity form fits into the picture Heidegger maps out. In establishing a dominant way of creating identity, many vital ways of making sense are occluded. When art is seen as a commodity, it is subject to the same process of identification with other commodities as any other object. The Nietzsche who questions the scientific evaluation of music offers a way out of this picture, whereas the Nietzsche who moves in the direction of a metaphysics of the Will to Power does not.

The following remark from Nietzsche's 1885–6 notes connects what Heidegger sees as Nietzsche's metaphysics to art: 'How far down does *art* reach into the essence of *power*?' (Nietzsche 1980: vol. xii, p. 128). One way of questioning the metaphysical interpretation of Nietzsche is precisely to see his own writing in aesthetic terms. His texts do not rely on conceptual consistency: their meaning therefore can be understood as also constituted by their form, in which differing perspectives are linked together to make a complex, sometimes ambiguous or paradoxical picture. In that case, though, thinking about the 'essence of *power*' as a means of understanding art falls prey to the fact that perspectivism is not least a means of dissolving questions of essence—which is also one way of seeing the diversity in the reception and production of art in modernity. The problem is also that the idea of the Will to Power echoes the arbitrary imposition of identity that is the essence of the commodity form, by reducing interpretation of the world to a metaphysical principle that only allows for quantitative differentiation. As such, it can be seen as itself another historical manifestation of reification, and as a product of the great transformation.

Even apart from the questionable metaphysical aspect of his critique of value, Nietzsche, as Nehamas contends, does not offer serious positive alternatives: 'the moment Nietzsche tries to draw explicit consequences from these views, and the moment his readers try to articulate these consequences, the promise implicit in them disappears. […] Nietzsche's views are, to put it bluntly but not inaccurately, simply *banal*' (Nehamas 1985: 221). The views veer, for example, between the extreme rejection of values like compassion and admittedly often quite acute psychological observations of particular ways in which Christian morality can, for instance, function merely as repression. But Nietzsche offers no sense of an alternative vision to those aspects of Christian ethics which have proven extremely durable, despite secularization. Given the brutality of the sociopolitical world of the great transformation—Nietzsche barely touches on the brutality of industrial life, and offers no

support for those seeking to reduce it, being expressly opposed to any kind of socialism and happily prepared to justify slavery—indifference to the suffering it creates is hardly a basis for a great new vision of modernity beyond Christian values. In this respect it is easy to see why Nietzsche has since often been co-opted by reactionary forces.

Nehamas thinks Nietzsche should be seen in terms of his own self-creation as a 'literary character' (1985: 234) through his texts: we observed something related in Montaigne's self-analyses. However, if Nietzsche plays as important a role in affecting the agenda of modern philosophy with respect to questions of value as he evidently does, we need a way of assessing how what he proposes relates to the great transformation. Nietzsche lives through an era when a real historical 'transvaluation of all values' occurs, namely the one Polanyi describes. However, he seems unconcerned that a material economic transformation has an impact, not just on the values in the commodity system, but on how people evaluate and respond to the world at all, and so on philosophy and art.

In *Dawn*, Nietzsche maintains:

> political and economic conditions are especially not worth the most gifted minds being allowed to or having to concern themselves with them: such a using up of mind is basically worse than a crisis [*Nothstand*]. They are and remain areas of work for the lesser minds, and those who are not lesser minds should not be available for this workplace.
>
> (Nietzsche 1980: vol. iii, p. 157)

It is not that Nietzsche completely fails to see the issue of capitalism in relation to the constitution of value and its effects on morality and art: 'But money is power, fame, distinction, primacy, influence; money now makes the big or small moral prejudice for a person, depending on how much he has' (p. 179). However, he directs most of his arguments for a transvaluation of values against Christian morality, with the banal results just noted. He seems largely blind to how massive systemic changes in the way things are evaluated, occasioned both by the commodity form and by technological command, lead to a situation where morality and, indeed, philosophy itself are put in question in new ways that also deeply affect the role of the arts.

In notes from his late period, Nietzsche does link the Will to Power to economics, but he does nothing to develop the link: 'The Will to Power in history (domination over natural forces, economic life)' (Nietzsche 1980: ol. xiii, p. 214). We saw him, in the later preface to the *BT*, approvingly claim that in

the *BT* 'art—and not morality—is presented as the real metaphysical activity of mankind'. However, he does not investigate how 'domination over natural forces, economic life' changes the status of art as the 'real metaphysical activity', for example by its becoming prone to commodification and trying to resist it. In this sense Nietzsche's diagnosis of the ills of Western philosophy and their relation to art, and to modern historical developments, can in the end only be seen as seriously deficient. The next two chapters will focus on two twentieth-century philosophers, Heidegger, and Adorno, who offer instructively different philosophical interpretations of art's relationship to the forces that drive modernity with which we have been concerned in this chapter.

# 6
# The World of Art

## Value and Objectification

If philosophy seeks to make 'maximal sense' (A. W. Moore) of the world, it seems evident that it should now be focusing on why—when the means for the improvement of human life are massively augmented, and the workings of nature are ever more intelligible, by the early part of the twenty-first century—humankind is looking into an abyss which would not exist but for that expansion of human knowledge. There is evidently a dissonance in modernity between increased knowledge and control of the world and major aspects of what makes sense of the world. Interpretation of expressive and other responses to that dissonance is, though, inherently contested. A predominant focus of Anglo-American philosophy remains the attempt to provide a rejoinder to epistemological scepticism by trying to bridge the notional separation between mind and world. This focus, as we have seen, is questionable, insofar as we know enough to see looming dangers in the contemporary world, but lack sufficient ways of adequately responding to them. So how should philosophy now respond?

The preceding chapter connected philosophical issues to systemic changes in modernity which cast a different light on art and aesthetics, and their relationships to forms of value. This chapter will explore further why making connections between art, systematic metaphysics, political economy, and the effects of technology on many domains of human life may offer ways of understanding the dissonances that characterize modernity. The danger here of dealing with things at too high a level of abstraction is lessened because the phenomena in question themselves involve a reduction of particularity to universal forms. The underlying issue is again the functioning of forms of identity and their relationships to other ways in which sense is made. Stated as baldly as this, the result seems again to be another abstract philosophical picture; but if one traces aspects of the historical development of philosophy in relation to the concrete issues raised in the previous chapters, things look less abstract.

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One can approach what is in question here by considering aspects of the work of Martin Heidegger, who had a revolutionary effect (not just on philosophy) when he published *Being and Time* in 1927. Art plays no direct role in *Being and Time*, but by 1933 at the latest art comes to play a central role in Heidegger, and continues to do so thereafter. The resonance of Heidegger's concerns with his contemporaries relates to the widespread sense, in the wake of the First World War, that human thinking had come adrift from the world. We have already encountered one interpretation of this in Lukács' *History and Class-Consciousness*. A further manifestation of the sense of dislocation is the emergence of phenomenology's concern with how meaning is manifested in the world at all, rather than just with knowledge. Even though phenomenology's philosophical roots precede the War, its cultural impact derives not least from the need to re-examine how human relations to the world are to be understood, which intensifies because of the War. Phenomenology itself leads in divergent directions, which echo the differences we have seen, between forms of philosophy that take the sciences and those that take the arts as their lead. In certain respects Husserl, for example, follows the path of seeking philosophical foundations for the sciences as a means of allaying sceptical doubts. At the same time, because of his concern with how things are meaningful at all—which is evident in his attention to the forms in which the world is given to us, such as consciousness of time—he opens up perspectives that are vital for Heidegger.

The historical point, which Husserl begins to appreciate more fully in his later texts, like *The Crisis of European Sciences* (1936), is that the enterprise of phenomenology is itself a response to how so much of modern thought neglects what makes it possible for there to be meaning in the world at all. Something akin to the questions about meaning being asked here is also evident in Wittgenstein's assertion in the 'Lecture on Ethics' (1929), that

> Suppose one of you were an omniscient person and therefore knew all the movements of all the bodies in the world dead or alive and that he also knew all the states of mind of all human beings that ever lived, and suppose this man wrote all he knew in a big book, then this book would contain the whole description of the world; and what I want to say is, that this book would contain nothing that we would call an ethical judgment or anything that would logically imply such a judgment. (Wittgenstein 1993: 39)

The lecture reflects on an extreme version of the issue of value in relation to the natural sciences: as Wittgenstein explains: 'I am going to use the term

Ethics […] in a sense in fact which includes what I believe to be the most essential part of what is generally called Aesthetics' (p. 38). In this perspective, what gives meaning to life lies outside anything that can be known, and so demands other forms of expression. Wittgenstein's engagement with music belongs to this approach (see Bowie 2013: ch. 8) when he says, for example: 'Understanding a sentence in language is much more related to understanding a theme in music than one thinks', and: 'One wants to say: "Because I know what that all means." But what does it mean? I couldn't say' (Wittgenstein 1984: 440).

Such concern with value and meaning can be seen in terms of how objectification may occlude other forms of sense. Heidegger was familiar with *History and Class-Consciousness* and adopts the term 'reification' in *Being and Time*, though he responds to what is in question in different ways from Lukács. The issue for Heidegger is how forms of sense may be retrieved that have been lost or forgotten. However, the need for the creation of new sense can clearly also arise when existing forms of sense become hollowed out by disenchantment, or by the trauma occasioned by the First World War. The tension between retrieval and innovation of sense is crucial to assessing Heidegger's approach, because in certain respects he orients himself predominantly towards the former, as his idea of the 'forgetting of Being' suggests. *Being and Time* and Heidegger's other work of this period emerge from his engagement with the work of Husserl, but he takes a new direction by radicalizing the questions Husserl raises, and this radicalization takes him in the direction of art.

## Art and Being

The intensified concern from the late nineteenth century onwards with the relationship to the sciences of other forms of engagement with the world helps to explain the emergence of the questions posed by Heidegger. As we saw in Chapter 4, Wilhelm Dilthey and others focus on the contrast between natural scientific knowledge and forms of knowledge in the 'human sciences', which are often seen as lacking the rigour enabled by the growing mathematization of the object of study in the natural sciences. Dilthey seeks to develop methods for the human sciences that take account of the fact that they necessarily involve particularity and individuality, and resist law-bound explanation. In the light of the subsequent development of analytical philosophy, where in some of the more extreme approaches, like logical positivism, only logical and empirical scientific statements are accepted as candidates for truth, this

stance can be seen as leaving the door open for the relegation of what is not covered by the empirical sciences to 'opinion', the 'subjective', etc. The human sciences do not produce universally applicable methods of arriving at understanding, and so are supposedly unable to produce valid truths. Dilthey's initial response, that truth can in fact arise in non-natural scientific disciplines, because they deal with what we ourselves have 'created', took too little account of objective aspects of the humanities. He later comes to realize this: 'The individual is only the crossing point for cultural systems, organisations, into which the individual's existence is woven: how could they be understood via the individual?' (Dilthey 1981: 310). The question is, then, how the truth of observational science relates to truth in the human sciences, and what difference aesthetic questions make to this.

Heidegger seeks to circumvent the dilemmas present in Dilthey by not giving priority to the natural sciences, on the basis that both human and natural worlds must already make sense in non-scientific terms if the methods relevant to each are to be assessed. For Heidegger, the result of dominant modes of thinking in philosophy is that this prior sense is forgotten, and needs to be retrieved. In *Being and Time*, and other work of the same period, this task is addressed by looking at relationships to the world which necessarily precede objectifying the world, and this will become the route to his attention to art.

By beginning with analysis of 'being in the world' in terms of the 'average everydayness' inherent in our successful coping with the world in myriad practical ways, Heidegger argues that the issue of epistemological scepticism is misconceived. The 'problem of the external world' entails that

> the analysis of reality is only possible on the basis of the appropriate access to the real. […] To the extent that the character of the in-itself and of independence belongs to reality, the question of the meaning of reality is connected with that of the possible independence of the real 'from consciousness', or that of the possible transcendence of consciousness into the 'sphere' of the real. (Heidegger 1979: 202)

Until the 'being' of that which 'transcends' itself, and of that which is independent is clarified, the basis of sceptical questions is lacking. Cognition is for Heidegger grounded instead in 'the basic constitution of Dasein, being-in-the-world. This has the more primordial constitution of care' (p. 202), because it must be always already actively concerned about the world before questions about cognitive reliability and truth can arise. As a result: 'The question as to whether there is a world at all and whether its being can be proved is, as a

question which Dasein as being-in-the-world poses—and who else should pose it?—without meaning' (p. 202), and 'world is essentially disclosed *with the being* of Dasein' (p. 203).

It is not that the world is therefore inherently intelligible as a whole: 'inner-worldly entities in the sense of the real, only present at hand [*nur Vorhandenen*] can precisely remain covered. The real [*Reales*] is, however, only discoverable on the basis of a world that is already disclosed. And only on this basis can the real still remain *hidden*' (p. 203). For something to be lacking there must be a prior way in which things are not lacking for the lack to manifest itself. Dreyfus and Taylor suggest:

> descriptions and attributions may be wrong, but what must remain is the world within which the questions arose to which they were the wrong answers, the world that I cannot escape from, because I need it in a host of ways, in the final analysis even to know who I am and what I'm about—even if what I'm about is renouncing the world to go into the desert.
>
> (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 70)

By always posing the question of the 'external world' in terms of things conceived primarily as objects of knowledge—thus as the 'present at hand', as opposed to in terms of always already occurring practical involvement with things in the world as 'ready to hand' (*zuhanden*)—the question of epistemological scepticism becomes unanswerable.

Heidegger's decisive objection is that '*The being present at hand together of the physical and the psychological is ontically and ontologically completely different from the phenomenon of being-in-the-world*' (Heidegger 1979: 204). The attempt at a proof of the external world, of the kind Kant offers in the first Critique, is therefore a mistake: 'The "scandal of philosophy" does not consist in the fact that this proof is still lacking, but *in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted over and over again*' (p. 205). As we have seen, the German for 'object'—*Gegenstand*—has the sense of 'standing against', and Heidegger uses this sense, in a manner related to what we saw in Cassirer's exploration of the emergence of notions of 'objectivity', to establish his core model:

> Resistance [*Widerständigkeit*] characterizes the being of innerworldly entities. Experiences of resistance only factically determine the extent and the direction of the discovery of entities encountered in the world. Their cumulative effect does not first introduce the disclosure of world, but

> presupposes it. That which is 'opposed' and 'against' is carried in its ontological possibility by disclosed being-in-the-world. (Heidegger 1967: 210)

Heidegger's philosophy might be said to depend on the consequences of 'disclosed being-in-the-world' not being based on resistance of an object to the subject. This will be a major reason why he comes to pay so much attention to art's disclosure of the world.

In *Being and Time* a major aim is to clarify the difference between apprehending things and their relationship to Dasein in the 'ontic', objectifying terms used for the world as 'present at hand', and the prior 'ontological' relationship manifest in what is 'ready to hand' in Dasein's practical coping with the world. Heidegger's famous example of the hammer exemplifies this difference: a hammer is part of the 'equipment/stuff' (*Zeug*) of everyday life, and exists for Dasein in a non-objective manner when it uses the hammer: 'The particular appropriate way of dealing with equipment, in which alone it can genuinely show itself in its being, e.g. hammering with the hammer, does not *apprehend* this entity thematically as a thing present to hand' (1979: 69). Rather than objective knowledge of the hammer's weight, chemical constitution, length, etc., revealing its essence, the most apt way of apprehending the hammer is precisely by using it to hammer something. The more one is involved in this activity with the object as 'ready to hand', 'the more it is encountered undisguised as what it is' (p. 69).

In a version of the contrast between observation and participation we considered in earlier chapters, the truth about the hammer *qua* hammer, rather than *qua* physical object, is revealed by action in a world where, so to speak, sheds need to be built. The ready-to-hand way of being escapes the kind of attention which seeks to establish an objective picture of the world, and so has to be uncovered, because most of the time it is hidden: 'The peculiarity of that which is initially ready to hand is, as it were, to withdraw itself in its ready to handness, in order precisely to be really ready to hand' (Heidegger 1979: 69). When using a hammer the vital aspect is what it is being used for in a specific context. That use is its meaning. The meaning does not lie in the fact that one possesses or is holding a hammer *qua* perceivable, conceptualizable object. Its status as an object is always secondary to the demands of a world in which hammers are needed. Readiness to hand 'may not be understood as just the character of apprehension, as if the "entities" that are initially encountered had such "aspects" imposed on them, as if an in itself initially present at hand piece of world equipment were "subjectively coloured" in this manner' (p. 71). The meaning at issue here is, then, not to be thought of as 'subjective', because

there is no sense of an epistemological or other gap between the subject and the things it uses as part of its world. This will have decisive consequences for how Heidegger comes to see art.

Anyone who plays a musical instrument can understand what Heidegger is getting at: the instrument becomes a part of oneself when one is absorbed in the act of performing. Clearly this does not happen all the time, and when there is something mechanically wrong with the instrument or when playing something proves difficult on that instrument, it shows up in a different manner, as something 'objective', in the sense of something resistant that needs to be mastered. And this is the crux. When something ceases to work, its context of significance, which is itself not manifest, becomes manifest as 'standing against' one. As anybody who loses their mobile phone knows, the world suddenly becomes a different place, and reveals 'for what and with what that which is missing was ready to hand' (Heidegger 1979: 75). Heidegger, in a manner again close to Cassirer, applies the distinction at issue here to signs: 'Signs always primarily show that "within which" one lives' (p. 80), rather than being indicators of things. In sum: '*A sign is something ontically ready to hand that at the same time, as this particular piece of equipment, functions as something that indicates the ontological structure of being ready to hand, of a totality of indications and of worldness*' (p. 82). 'World', for Heidegger, is a context of connected meanings which Dasein always already inhabits, rather than the totality of things, facts, or states of affairs. This distinction, which is echoed in the differences between many analytical and European approaches, is crucial to why the aesthetic dimensions are so important for contemporary philosophy.

The decisive issue is how we relate to meanings in Heidegger's sense, and how they relate to the world *qua* object of knowledge. 'Meaning' here is not intended in a semantic, representational sense, but instead has to do with the active ways in which we inhabit and participate in a world that always already concerns and involves us. This sense of meaning opens up space for consideration of truth and art in ways which a predominantly semantic approach does not. Heidegger elucidates how he thinks of meaning as follows: 'But significance itself, with which Dasein is always already familiar, holds in itself the ontological condition of possibility for Dasein, as what understands, to be able, as that which interprets, to disclose something like "meanings", which for their part in turn found the possible being of word and language' (1979: 87). Without an already disclosed world in which Dasein is always already involved, there is nothing which would make signs significant at all: 'Words accrue to meanings, but word-things are not furnished with meanings' (1979: 161). Language 'can be smashed into present at hand word-things', but it must

first be a 'meaning-totality of comprehensibility' (p. 161) that is ready to hand—i.e. always already inhabited because of the nature of being in the world—before it can be objectified as something present at hand. The expression of being-in, i.e. of the way the world is disclosed to Dasein, 'lies in the tone of voice, the modulation, the tempo of the speech "in the manner of speaking". The communication of the existential possibilities of state of mind [*Befindlichkeit*], i.e. the disclosure of existence, can become the proper goal of "poetic" [*dichtenden*] speech' (p. 162).

## Art and Truth

The passage just cited is the only one directly involving something aesthetic to appear in *Being and Time*. It should already be evident, though, that Heidegger's approach connects to many of the responses to scepticism involving reflection on art that we have been considering. Quite why Heidegger does not consider how art relates to what he intends in *Being and Time* is not clear. By the early 1930s, however, the move towards art becomes fully explicit. In lectures from 1933–4, later published under the title of *Being and Truth*, what was latent in *Being and Time* becomes manifest. These lectures precede the essay 'Origin of the Work of Art' (1935–6), and they offer perspectives that are decisive for the future of Heidegger's thought. The ideas in question are presented in a framework which also includes some clumsy attempts to link his philosophical thinking to his view of the Nazi takeover of Germany as heralding a new era. Without wishing to dismiss the glaring problems here (see my essay and the other essays in Farin and Malpas 2016 for an analysis of Heidegger's politics), the most productive aspects of the texts do not necessarily lead in the political direction Heidegger endorses. The short explanation of why is that, while what he says might be revolutionary with respect to philosophy, it is not, as he himself sometimes realizes, transferrable to the contingencies of the politics of his day.

The core of the lectures is their exploration of truth, which will lead Heidegger to the question of how art relates to truth in the work of art essay (Heidegger 1980). This exploration involves a consideration of the role of mathematics in attempts to ground truth in Western philosophy, and this connects to the questions about identity and its role in objectification, commodification, and quantification that we considered in the previous chapter. The mathematical is characterized, in the wake of Descartes and Leibniz, as the 'experience-free order of foundation of principles and corollaries'

(Heidegger 2001: 35). Consequently: 'The mathematical form of knowledge is for modern philosophy until Hegel not just an external frame for the presentation of the system, but the *inner law* from which the substantial approach of philosophy, and, at the same time, the *idea of truth* determine themselves' (p. 36). The demand for a certain and simple proposition, like 'I think, I am', as a foundation 'is only valid if one presupposes that knowing and asking in philosophy are subordinate to the "mathematical" method' (pp. 40–41). This presupposition itself is, however, not grounded, and must have 'the character of being indubitably present at hand' (p. 41), thus of being 'objective'.

In the next step, which is decisive for much of Heidegger's account of the history of modern metaphysics, that which is 'indubitably present at hand is the *I*, that thinks' (Heidegger 2001: 41). Heidegger makes his core objection clear: 'But the recurrence to the I by the reflection on doubt is only *the illusion* of originality and radicalism (behind and above it stands the dogma of the primacy of the mathematical method)' (p. 42). The 'historicality and essential connectedness of the person with those existing together with it' (p. 43) fail to appear in this conception of the self, because it is conceived as an isolated originary point, as a result of the primacy of mathematical thinking. The idea echoes Cassirer's assessment of the cogito, where 'the pure form of logic is again raised to being the prototype and model for all mental [*geistige*] being and every mental form' (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 15). Such thinking means that '[t]he essence of truth is determined from out of certainty' (Heidegger 2001: 45) of the kind found in maths: 'Accordingly the idea of mathematical certainty decides in advance what truly is and what can be addressed as authentic being' (pp. 45–6). Given the connection between the subject's self-certainty and the certainty of mathematical axioms, the way is open for what Heidegger comes to think of in terms of the 'subjectification' of Being in modern technology, in which the subject dominates Being by the application of mathematical principles in technology.

We saw a version of the idea here in Dewey's reflections on the idea of a timeless system of nature in the Introduction and Chapter 1. There epistemology is 'framed on the foundation provided by *first truths* as premises', and knowledge becomes identified with 'that which cannot be doubted' (Dewey 2012: loc. 2046). As Dewey argued, however, science actually works in terms of probabilities and heuristic models, rather than in terms of foundational certainties. Heidegger then explores the relationship between the resulting modern conception of truth as 'rightness' ('*Richtigkeit*')—a true 'expression corresponds to reality by *aligning* itself [*sich* ***richtet***] *according to reality* in its saying' (Heidegger 2001: 98)—and truth as 'un-hiddenness' (*Unverborgenheit*)

in Greek thinking, for which truth is essentially hidden. The former derives from the fact of measuring, '*aligning of* something *according to* something' (p. 98), the latter from the action of disclosing what would otherwise be hidden. In *The Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl will, in the light of his reception of Heidegger, link measuring to the use of ever more accurate maps for military purposes as a vital moment in the 'mathematization of the cosmos', thereby underlining the phenomenological relationship of the abstractions of philosophy to the practical demands of the 'life-world'.

The transition to the issue of art occurs when Heidegger considers how philosophy has tended to treat language as something to be objectified by the 'grammatical' conception of language. Here language is 'something present at hand' (Heidegger 2001: 102): 'the more or less explicit idea of language emerges, as if it were primarily and really the *announcement of thinking* in the sense of the *theoretical* observation and discussion of things' (p. 104). Heidegger considers this '*a monstrous violation of the achievement* of language; compare a poem or a lively conversation from person to person; the nature of the voice, the tone, the melody of the sentence, rhythm, and so forth' (p. 104). The main question is, therefore, the following, which is a version of the constitutive conception of language: 'Is language a however richly articulated pale imitation of being/entities [*des Seienden*] as a whole, or is this being as a whole, as being *only in effect and unfolded in and through language*?' (p. 106).

A specific sense of 'silence' is central to this approach: 'Each utterance is an interruption of being silent, where this interruption need not be understood negatively' (Heidegger 2001: 106). Being silent, which inanimate things cannot be, as they do not have the possibility of speech, 'is a mode of being able to speak' (p. 108): 'we can often say more precise things through being silent than by the most extensive speaking' (p. 109). Remaining silent is a condition of being open to the world, which can then enable the word to make sense: 'the word is not the copy and after-image of things, but rather the restraining formation' (p. 111) of what is disclosed in the world. Language is constitutive of what can be manifest, but its capacity to make sense also depends on the prior openness of the world. This cannot be articulated in a theoretical description, and so has to be experienced in our changing relationship to language in the world. The space of meaning opened up by the lack of a word that we need is the real ground of language, because it establishes the possibility of, and the demand for, the articulation of sense. Sense is constituted temporally by the subject being open to the world and the world mattering to it, rather than being defined primarily in terms of words representing pre-existing things.

It should now be clearer why Heidegger's approach leads in the direction of art. The difficulty of interpreting what he says lies in the fact that it cannot be set out in the form of an explanatory theory. His reflections on 'light' in relation to questions of truth deriving from Plato's myth of the cave can, though, help to interpret what he intends. What is at issue is how sense emerges in the world at all, which is why he comes to see art as so crucial. He considers the phenomenon of 'brightness' (*Helligkeit*): 'We can't grasp brightness like some thing or other. Brightness is so to speak ungraspable—like nothingness, like emptiness' (Heidegger 2001: 154). 'Brightness' is not a degree of intensity of measurable light derived from a theory of light:

> theories of light have existed for centuries (Newton; corpuscular theory, wave-theory, electromagnetic theory, etc.). All these theories may be right as physical theories, and yet they can be untrue and be inadequate to the *phenomenon* […] We only grasp light when we hold onto the phenomenon in relation to our *natural seeing and looking*. (Heidegger 2001: 154)

He elucidates this when he says that a scientific theory cannot grasp 'the look of a person into the eye of the other' (p. 154). This points directly to a vital aspect of how Heidegger sees art. In a painting the ability to capture the look in the eyes of the person portrayed is often what is most revelatory in the painting, and experiencing this in art can make us experience others' looks in new ways.

Meanings in the world in which we act and interact are always already present before any attempt to give an objective account of them. Giving such accounts itself derives from an involved understanding of the world which is the precondition of such accounts. The problem is how to talk about this understanding. In *Being and Time* the conditions of understanding were largely seen in terms of pre-theoretical practical coping. Now Heidegger thinks in terms of what he elsewhere characterizes as the 'clearing' (*Lichtung*), the open space in a forest which enables a sense of location and illumination, even though it itself is nothing. Without the open space there is nothing but opacity; the space reveals the nature of that opacity, and this functions as a metaphor for how the world makes sense, in a play between things becoming manifest and being hidden. As we saw with respect to the early Romantics in Chapter 3, the significance of art lies in its sense never being definitively manifest, but yet demanding ever-renewed attention.

The controversial aspect of what Heidegger adumbrates here lies in his use of 'rightness/correctness', rather than 'truth', for scientific theories about light.

The implication is that 'truth' essentially concerns doing justice to phenomena, which can, as suggested by the example of the look in the painting, take many forms. Truth here has to do with the emergence of sense, rather than the validation of claims to objectivity. The standard semantic objection to this, familiar from Ernst Tugendhat (1970) and others, is that it leaves no place for things being disclosed in a manner which is false, because world-disclosure does not involve the bivalence inherent in declarative sentences. We saw reasons in Chapter 4 for questioning this, in Mark Wrathall's analysis of Heidegger's remarks about perceptual errors: 'perception itself is not "measured against the idea of an absolute knowledge of the world" (GA 2: H. 38)' (Wrathall 2011: 61). As Merleau-Ponty suggested: 'the world is not a sum of things which might always be called into question, but the inexhaustible reservoir from which things are taken (PP 344)' (Wrathall 2011: 69).

The 'world' here is the horizon or context in which things can become significant, and is inherently temporal, rather than, for example, being the Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus*' 'totality of facts'. Such contrasts in the notion of 'world' have important consequences. Heidegger sees Galileo as establishing a 'new basic attitude to reality […] *before* all questions and determinations, he fixed what should belong to the *essence of a nature*', by seeing it as a '*spatio-temporal context of movements of mass-points*. He fixed what nature should be by a ***prior intervention*** [***"Vorgriff"***] into reality' (Heidegger 2001: 162). Only on that prior interpretative basis, which did not 'belong to the essence of a nature' before this, does the mathematical experimental method become possible. Heidegger connects this conception to art. Rather than being a mode of self-expression or a source of pleasure: 'the innermost sense of all artistic creation [*Gestalten*, in the sense of 'giving form'] is to make the *possible* manifest, i.e. the *free creative projection* of what is *possible for human being*' (p. 164). Instead of subsuming the particular under a general law, art indicates how 'in the light of the possibilities, to see reality, to grasp the in each case singular real thing as that which it is' (p. 164). One can see how such a conception evolves from his phenomenological account of the hammer: in both cases grasping something as something is not primarily a cognitive process.

Heidegger then asserts, 'For this reason poetry [*Dichtung*, which has the wider connotation of 'creative art'] means much more than all science' (2001: 164). The key to this is the sense of 'means'. This is apparent in what he said about Galileo, where the projective basis on which sense can occur in the world was prior to what becomes manifest through it, e.g via application of modern mathematical methods. At the same time, this projective basis can hide other possibilities of understanding the world that do not rely on mathematical

methods. Scientism and reductive naturalisms exclude consideration of this prior level of sense, or seek to explain it in scientific terms. In Heidegger's perspective, art manifests the prior 'opening' which makes it possible for things to have meaning at all, and can reveal possibilities which would not occur without it.

His approach opens up space to think about how we gain more and more control of nature, and yet may be blind to the dangers of making such control the dominant stance towards the world. The scientific underpinning of the awareness of what has now become the global climate emergency developed in many respects very late. The projective basis of the dominant forms of science did not involve the holistic connections required to understand how the balance of life on earth can be threatened by the interaction of factors that scientific research methodologically isolates from each other. The idea of the world as a connected totality is, of course, a central aspect of the new approaches to nature that develop in German Idealist and Romantic philosophy. In the period in which Heidegger is writing, the status of nature is, though, radically changed by the application of new technology, and it is in this perspective that philosophical issues concerning art take on new significance.

## The History of Art, and Art as Event

In order to highlight further what is at stake in Heidegger's reflections on art, I want briefly to look at them in relation to Cassirer. Peter E. Gordon (2012) has detailed the famous 1929 encounter of the two men in Davos, and he shows in masterly fashion how this specific occasion illustrates wider tensions which still affect contemporary philosophy. Habermas summarizes Cassirer's approach to symbolic forms: 'the objectifying force of symbolic mediation breaks the animal immediacy of a nature which impacts on the organism simultaneously from within and without; only with this does it create that distance from the world which makes possible a thoughtful, reflectively inhibited reaction to the world' (Habermas 1996: 16). Gordon frames the differences between Cassirer and Heidegger as being between Kantian 'spontaneity' as the core idea in Cassirer, in contrast to 'receptivity' in Heidegger. Whereas Cassirer thinks the developing symbol-generating capacities of the subject are the ground of the world's becoming increasingly intelligible, Heidegger thinks such privileging of the activity of the subject has, as Gordon puts it, 'conspired to obstruct our recognition of ourselves as thrown into an existence where historical mastery is an impossibility' (Gordon 2012: 363).

Indeed, the search for such mastery constitutes a central aspect of what Heidegger wishes to replace with a new kind of thinking which does not depend on it, and is informed by art.

Habermas sees Cassirer as holding on to 'the perspective of epistemology' (Habermas 1996: 33), such that '[t]he philosophy which is supposed to analyse all symbolic forms lacks its own language. For a symbolic form with which it could raise itself above all other symbolic forms would be a paradox in terms of its own presuppositions' (p. 34). By holding on to a residually Cartesian subject–object model, even as he shows possibilities of overcoming it in his conception of language and intersubjectivity, Cassirer leaves himself open to Heidegger's main objection in the Davos debate. Heidegger:

> One could say that the terminus ad quem in Cassirer is the totality of a philosophy of culture in the sense of an elucidation of the totality of the forms of the constituting [*gestaltenden*] consciousness. The terminus a quo is completely problematic. […] Cassirer wants to exhibit the differing forms of constitution [*Gestaltung*], in order then retrospectively himself to enact a certain dimension of the constituting forces in relation to these constitutions.
>
> (Heidegger 1973: 288–9)

The problem Heidegger points to is inherent in the Romantic metaphor we have already encountered, in which the eye cannot see itself seeing. We may come to know all the objective factors in seeing, via physics, chemistry, biology, etc.; but for this to happen, something that resists such objectification, namely the prior manifestation of intelligibility which enables us to understand anything as anything at all, must always already have occurred. The metaphysics Heidegger seeks to circumvent, which he sees as being continued by Cassirer, tries to explain the ground on which it relies while covertly presupposing it. The question is therefore how to take account of that ground.

Both Cassirer and Heidegger are concerned in this context with the relationship of philosophy to freedom. Cassirer sees freedom as lying in the subject's capacity to develop symbolic forms that order human existence, and so can liberate it from fear. Heidegger, in contrast, sees freedom in terms of struggle:

> I have spoken of a liberation in the sense that the liberation of the inner transcendence of Dasein is itself the basic character of philosophy. But the real sense of this liberation does not lie in becoming free, as it were, for the constituting images of consciousness and for the realm of form, but to become free for the finitude of Dasein. Precisely to enter the thrownness of

> Dasein, to enter the conflict [*Widerstreit*] which lies in the essence of freedom. (Heidegger 1973: 289)

In a manner analogous to the later Schelling, freedom is only manifest in the attempt to come to terms with what inhibits one, which here is the contingency of Dasein. For Heidegger, 'Art is not just a form of consciousness that constitutes itself, but art has a metaphysical sense within the basic happening of Dasein itself' (Heidegger 1973: 290–91). Whereas Cassirer sees a progressing self-elucidation of humankind via the forming of symbols, Heidegger thinks this prejudges the issue by assuming the process of constitution can be transparent to itself in philosophy.

Cassirer was involved with the Warburg school of the history of art, which seeks to understand culture in developing historical contexts, such that spirit reflects upon its own products. He thereby tries to answer the question: 'How it is possible that we can see a work of art as something objectively determined, as objectively existing, as this meaningful thing in its totality at all?' (295), which, as we saw, he analogizes with the way language both consists of objective natural material and conveys meaning via holistic connections. Any definitive explanation of what makes this possible remains for Heidegger, in contrast, in the metaphysical tradition which attempts to escape the contingency and finitude of Dasein. He talks instead of the

> inner structure of the relatedness of a person who is, so to speak, chained in a body and in this being-chained in the body stands in a connection with beings, finds itself in the middle of beings, not in the sense of a spirit which looks down on them, but in the sense that Dasein, thrown in the middle of beings, as free, carries out a break-in into beings which is always historical and in a final sense contingent. (Heidegger 1973: 290)

Rather than establish a history which seeks to explain symbolic forms, and is congruent with aspects of the discipline of the history of art, Heidegger wants to get at how art relates to the contingency and 'nullity' (*Nichtigkeit*) he sees as at the heart of Dasein.

Cassirer can be seen as homogenizing the history of art, which is embodied in the developing human capacity for symbol creation and objectification:

> Language and art, and mythology and theoretical cognition—they all work together, each according to its own inner law, on this process of intellectual [*geistige*] putting at a distance: they are the great stages on the route which

> leads from the space of grasping and effecting in which the animal lives and in which it is, so to speak, captured, to the space of intuition and thought, to the intellectual [*geistigen*] 'horizon'. (Cassirer 2003: 51)

As we just saw, Heidegger regards Dasein as 'chained in a body' and 'in the middle of beings', which means he thinks the 'intellectual "horizon"' can never transcend the contingency of what we are. The question is therefore what responses to this situation make sense, which is where art comes into the equation. Heidegger was beginning, at the time of Davos, to question what can be seen as transcendental aspects of *Being and Time*, in which the activity of Dasein is the condition of possibility of the world's intelligibility. This results in his new approaches to asking the question of Being that inform his work of the period of the *Origin of the Work of Art* which we began to investigate above.

The main issue with respect to Cassirer is that Heidegger connects contingency to the idea of art as a 'happening' that is essential to his approach to truth. The point of such a happening is that something essentially new is disclosed via the artwork. Only if this occurs can we talk of art in the sense he intends. Art can therefore cease to be art when it no longer discloses something new, or when it is encountered in a context unconnected to its original context. Such a view is not compatible with seeing art in terms of a universalizing history of developing symbolic forms. Both approaches come at a cost. Cassirer's offers insights into human cultural development in detailed historical contexts, but it may diminish the unique 'event' that is transformative art. Heidegger asks searching questions with respect to how we think about art and truth, but offers quite meagre results in terms of understanding the historical and cultural specificity of particular stages of art's history.

The core of Heidegger's work-of-art-essay is the notion of 'world'. Kant already began to temporalize the notion by his insistence that what is real is what can be 'given in intuition', which brings time, as a 'form of intuition', into the understanding of what exists. The totality of the real is only a regulative idea, because it cannot be given in intuition and so, in Kant's terms, cannot be said to exist, even if we use the idea of this totality to give order to how we systematize knowledge of nature. Markus Gabriel responds to the question 'What is the world?' by arguing that 'the world is neither the totality of things nor the totality of facts, but it is that domain in which all existing domains are found. All domains that exist belong to the world. The world is, as Martin Heidegger accurately formulated it, "the domain of all domains"' (Gabriel 2015: 45). Consequently, 'there is no such thing as the domain of all domains.

This leaves room for the position that there are all sorts of domains, just that they are not building blocks of a bigger, all-encompassing domain' (p. 45). As such, the world does not exist in the sense that things in the world exist, which, in Gabriel's terms, exist in 'domains of sense'. This position suggests the importance of a notion of 'world' which, like Heidegger's, does not assume that it is the physical universe explained by the natural sciences, with all the metaphysical commitments which that entails. Heidegger's connection of 'world' with his concern with questions of art and truth is fundamental to his thought.

Heidegger's approach is predicated, as we saw, on the assumption that Being involves 'hiddenness'. Rather than being a 'ready-made world' which we seek to re-present truly, be it in scientific theories or other symbolic systems, Heidegger's world is that which is disclosed against the resistance of what he terms the 'earth'. For the world to mean anything, there must also be resistance against the emergence of meaning, as otherwise meaning would not matter. Hence the connections he makes between freedom and art: meaning arises through a liberation from something which resists, even though there is no final way of overcoming this resistance, and no progressively fuller representation of something pre-given. The fact that he is wary of referring to '*the* world' makes the implications of this issue clearer:

> World is not the mere collection of present at hand, countable and uncountable, known and unknown things. But world is also not a merely imagined frame which is thought of as an addition to the sum of the present at hand. *World worlds* and is more in being [*seiender*] than what can be grasped and heard, in which we believe we can be at home. World is never an object that stands before us and can be looked at. (Heidegger 1980: 30)

World has to be disclosed, and this is what the artwork does: 'The work as work erects a world. The work holds open the openness of the world' (p. 30).

Heidegger's example of the Greek temple makes clear what is meant: 'By erecting a world, the temple-work […] does not make the material disappear, but rather makes it emerge for the first time precisely in the openness of the world of the work' (1980: 31). The environment of the temple, the rock it stands on, the metals and colours it is made of, and the sounds in the environment take on significance they previously did not have, because they now form a context that orients peoples' lives. If we try to penetrate or weigh the stone of the temple, which becomes manifest in a new way by being in this world, this significance is destroyed. The earth is, then, precisely that which resists explanation, but which can be opened up in art, such that it makes new sense.

Romantic art enabled the emergence of new apprehensions of landscape. If we see a landscape in the light of this change and then try to get behind what it is that is so laden with significance, it dissolves into the isolated elements we see, be they hills, stones, grass, trees, etc., as we approach them: 'The earth makes all penetration into it disintegrate through itself' (Heidegger 1980: 32). Heidegger sees this as resistance against 'the technological scientific objectification of nature' (p. 32), because 'The earth is what essentially closes itself off. Setting up [*herstellen*, which normally has the sense of 'produce'] the earth means: bringing it into the openness as that which closes itself off' (p. 33). If one looks at a work of art in terms of what it is made of, be it stone, wood, soundwaves, etc., it is not apprehended as a work. For it to be a work, sense has to emerge from what resists sense. What resists also plays an ineliminable role in this: otherwise it would not matter that it is overcome. Art, then, gives ways of responding to the resistance of things to being definitively opened up. Heidegger presents this in terms of a 'conflict' between earth and world: 'In the conflict each carries the other beyond itself' (p. 34). It is not properties of the artwork's materials that emerge in art's making a world; instead something happens that gives new sense to those materials: the analogy to language is once again present here.

One can give physicalist descriptions of artworks, but the truth of that description has nothing to do with its status as art, as we saw Nietzsche already argue. Heidegger asks: 'to what extent does truth happen in the carrying out of the conflict between world and earth?' (1980: 35). The fact that truth 'happens' already means that what is at issue cannot be thought of in semantic terms. The easy way out here is just to say, as Heidegger himself later did in response to Tugendhat's criticism we touched on above, that one can uncover things that are false, so that it is wrong to conflate 'the natural concept of truth' (Heidegger 1988: 77) with 'unhiddenness', as he does in the artwork essay. It is, though, as the essay makes clear, justifiable to suggest that the scope of 'truth' can be extended beyond bivalent utterances: 'But we don't just call a sentence true, but also a thing [*Sache*], true gold as opposed to apparent gold' (Heidegger 1980: 35). One can add the sense of 'being true to' someone, or true to a score in music, or a musical tradition, and other uses of the word that convey a sense of what might sometimes be termed 'rightness' or 'genuineness'.

Using 'true' in this context may seem more trouble than it is worth, if one is focussing on certain kinds of mainstream philosophical debate. However, highlighting the idea that it is only in the context of an already disclosed world that things can be brought to light, and so be candidates for expression

in true or false utterances, can justify a focus on art as bringing to light what is otherwise hidden. In music, when something is not 'right' about a piece or a performance, it reveals the kind of apprehension involved in the idea that truth is a norm that gives rise to obligations. We talk in this sense of a performance 'doing justice' to a work, for example, which is 'being true to it'. Art establishes frames of apprehension and judgement, and practices, such that art which fails to live up to the demands of these frames and practices is wrong, in the manner that untrue statements hide rather than reveal the world. The crux in thinking about truth in relation to world is the connection of truth with human practices and the ways in which meaning is generated, rather than truth primarily being a mode of representation of a 'ready-made' reality. This is why Heidegger opens space for thinking about why modernity results in the ecological crisis, by his questioning of the dominant objectifying ways in which nature has come to be responded to.

## Art and Metaphysics

Heidegger sees art in terms of 'truth's putting itself into the work', which involves 'the bringing-forth of an entity [*eines Seienden*] that previously was not, and afterwards will never come into being again' (1980: 48). This captures something important about art's relationship to innovation and particularity, especially in the modern period. At the same time, he maintains that 'science is not an original happening of truth, but the extension of a realm of truth that is already open' (p. 48). The basis of this claim is the view of mathematics we encountered above, where the world becomes subordinated to the 'mathematical method'. Art matters in this perspective because it enables things to happen which escape the frames that ground dominant features of modernity.

Given the continuing attempts to explain art in objectifying terms, such as in evolutionary theory, neuroscience, etc., Heidegger's position points to something significant. Such explanations miss what is irreducible about art's ability to bring the world to light in new ways: 'But what is more usual than the fact that something is? In the work, in contrast, the fact that it *is* as something is the unusual' (Heidegger 1980: 52). This stance echoes both Russian formalism's idea of *ostranenie*, in which poetic language makes everyday words 'strange', and Brecht's related theory of 'alienation' in theatre, which seeks to make people realize that what they see as normal is actually abnormal. In a similar vein, Dewey and Adorno see art in terms of 'experience', not as the empiricist registering and classifying of sense data or

perceptions, but as openness to new sense, which cannot be judged adequately in existing terms.

Heidegger is not saying that the sciences produce nothing new. His claim is rather that, instead of changing how we relate to the world in unforeseen ways, they work in the prior frame of the physical universe as the object of mathematical ordering. In the frame of previous norms of harmony, in contrast, new music may make no sense, as the standard complaint of 'That's not music' suggests, and it is the fact that it can come to make sense that is the key. New canons of art may be established in the light of this, which become part of the history of art, but it is the happening of the new that is philosophically essential. For Heidegger in this context, rather than truth being the conceptual grasping of something universal for all time: 'Truth is never read off from the present at hand and the usual', and art opens a space 'in the midst of entities in whose openness everything is other than it otherwise is' (1980: 58). This approach is echoed in what he says about language and art, which relates to how Cassirer analogizes them: 'In the generally accepted conception, language counts as a form of communication/information [*Mitteilung*]. […] But language is not only and not primarily a spoken and written expression of what is to be communicated. […] language first of all brings entities as entities into the open' (p. 59), before they become objects of communication.

Art and language are, then, essential to the question of Being, the question of how things are intelligible at all. Heidegger now responds to this question in terms of a history of Being, which traces how beings/entities are seen as making sense, from Greek philosophy, to the theology of divine creation in the Middle Ages, to the 'object that is capable of domination and being seen through by calculation' (1980: 63) that is the essence of the modern period. The shifts in this history are not the product of individual thinkers' ideas 'winning the argument', but 'happen' in a way which Heidegger thinks we can understand if we consider how art works change what things can be seen as, rather than interpreting them through what we know of the artist. In the terms of Wittgensteinian 'aspect-seeing', it is not just that something can be seen as either a duck or a rabbit, where these are pre-existing possibilities, but that in art things can come to be intelligible in ways which we could not know were possible until they happen.

Heidegger does not focus on the empirical aspects of art's history: 'art has a history in the external sense that it also occurs along with a lot of other things through the ages': his main claim is that 'Art is history in the essential sense that it founds history' (Heidegger 1980: 63: the German *Geschichte* involves the sense of 'happening', *geschehen*). He sums up the alternative, which can be

seen in terms of his difference from Cassirer, as follows: 'Do we know, i.e. do we pay attention to the essence of the origin [*Ursprung*, which has the sense of the 'primal leap' that brings about the new]? Or do we only appeal in our response to art to educated knowledge of the past?' (p. 74). In terms of his own historical situation, what Heidegger seeks here is obviously deeply problematic, because he links his conception of *Ursprung* to the Nazi idea of a new destiny for the German people. As Adorno warns in *Negative Dialectics*: 'The new beginning at a supposed zero-point is the mask of strenuous forgetting' (1997: vol. vi, p. 79). What Heidegger neglects is how radical political changes are often predominantly the result of economic breakdown, a topic he barely considers directly anywhere in his work, even though understanding key aspects of art in modernity, as we have seen, is inseparable from developments in political economy which transform relationships between subjective and objective, and the nature of value.

What Heidegger wants to understand does, though, go beyond the specific case of what is happening in Nazi Germany, and relates to the issues surrounding art, technology, capital, and modernity we have been examining. In 'The Age of the World Picture' of 1938, Heidegger maintains: 'In metaphysics reflection on the essence of beings and a decision on the essence of truth is carried out. Metaphysics grounds an age', such that the 'ground rules in all the phenomena which characterize the age' (Heidegger 1980: 73). He also, as we just saw, says that art grounds history, thus playing a role analogous to metaphysics, although it offers a different kind of grounding. His story is another version of the one concerning mathematics we considered above: for the Greeks, mathematics 'means that which humankind knows in advance in observing beings and dealing with things' (p. 78). This mathematical ground leads to the truth about phenomena in modernity coming to be seen in terms of exactitude: 'But mathematical natural scientific research is not exact because it calculates precisely, rather it must calculate in this way because its connection to its object domain has the character of exactitude' (p. 77).

The connection to issues we have looked at in the preceding chapters becomes more explicit when Heidegger says: 'This objectification of entities fulfils itself in a re-presentation [*Vor-stellung*] which aims to bring every entity before itself in such a way that the person calculating can be sure of the entity, and that means be certain of 1980' (1980: 85). This development is what makes science into 'research', and dependent on experiment. He sees the modern era in terms of the 'world picture': 'World picture, understood in an essential way, does not […] mean a picture of the world, but the world grasped as a picture', in which things only are 'to the extent that they are posited by

representing-producing man' (p. 87). He regards this as the 'essence of modernity [*Neuzeit*]' (p. 88), in which Being is forgotten or abandoned through the dominance of objectification. As opposed to the Greek 'listening to Being', where receptive openness is essential, the modern period represents Being according to its ruling principle, and so is no longer open to what escapes that principle.

Art offers an alternative to seeing the world as a 'picture'. It does not objectify the world, but rather initiates kinds of sense which are prior to objectivity. In line with his concern with art's relationship to truth, Heidegger rejects the idea of art as a subjective expression of experience, feeling, etc. The role of the modern subject is for him primarily as that which objectifies the world in the way which characterizes metaphysics since Descartes: 'The modern freedom of the subject dissolves completely into the objectivity which accords with it' (Heidegger 1980: 109). He does not deny that the modern period is also a period of 'subjectivism and individualism' (p. 86), but he sees this as the correlate of the dominance of the subject in technology. His concern with art and truth follows from his view of subjectivity in modernity, and its consequences for philosophy.

In the *Contributions to Philosophy* of 1936–8 he says of his approach to thinking: 'But the path of this conceiving of Being [*dieses Erdenkens des Seyns*] is not firmly drawn in on a country map [*Landkarte*]. The country only *comes into existence* through the path and is unknown at every point of the path and cannot be calculated' (Heidegger 1989: 66). This description can equally well be applied to the development of art and its disclosure of world. Heidegger's claim points to a division in conceptions of modern philosophy. Analytical philosophy of art that seeks, via 'conceptual analysis', to establish clarity about the notion of a 'work', or 'expression', fails, in a perspective like Heidegger's, to see that what may make art significant is precisely its resistance to philosophical explanation. Art questions objectification as the predominant approach to the world, and analytical philosophy of art's frequent failure to ask such questions can preclude the idea of philosophy learning anything from art.

Heidegger says of the 'truth of Being', 'The expression does not mean the "truth" "about" Being, something like a sequence of correct sentences about the truth of Being or an unshakeable "doctrine" of Being' (1989: 92). Claims to the truth about Being constitute the history of metaphysics, in which 'That which is [*das Seiende*] remains that which is present [*das Anwesende*], and what really is is that which is continually present and *in this way* conditions everything, the un-conditioned, the absolute, ens entium, Deus etc.' (p. 115). This account is, though, not adequate to the early Romantics' response to the

idea of the Absolute, which, like Heidegger, sees any positive philosophical approach to an ultimate ground as questionable, and does so in relation to art. As Novalis put it: 'The Absolute which is given to us can only be known negatively, by our acting and finding that no action can reach what we are seeking' (Novalis 1978: 181). Both approaches share a concern that the drive to objectification loses sight of what resists objectification, and so points to the need for philosophy in which art is central, rather than a secondary concern, and which countenances different understandings of truth.

Whatever may be wrong with Heidegger's approach, his concern that a world in which 'everything presses towards calculation, exploitation, cultivation [*Züchtung*], manageability and regulation' (Heidegger 1989: 124) can be deeply questionable now sounds prescient. This is underlined by the fact that the kind of philosophy that is centred on responses to epistemological scepticism signally lacked the vision that would foresee the ecological crisis that is a decisive issue in how we interpret the consequences of technological mastery. Once again, then, the real issue is not generalized doubt about the certainty of knowledge, but how to respond to distorted relationships to nature in modernity which are leading towards disaster. Heidegger insists on a separation of the tasks of philosophy and science: 'But "epistemology" is only the form of the perplexity of modern metaphysics in relation to itself' (p. 94), because it seeks to set up a prior realm of knowledge to explain the validity of knowledge. He sees the role of philosophy instead as akin to, or, in some cases, coextensive with, that of art, rather than as an adjunct to or coextensive with science.

Heidegger's own engagement with art's role in modernity is both questionable, because of how he connects it to politics, and frequently rather lacking in substance and indeterminate. In some circumstances indeterminacy may justifiably follow from the attempt to circumvent existing forms of thought in the name of opening up a new kind of thinking. However, it is sometimes hard to say what the outcome of his approach is, beyond gestures towards 'an other beginning' (1989: 134) that cannot be explained or calculated, but must be listened for in forms which do not aim at what science and technology aim at. Heidegger distinguishes between what must be 'strict' in its procedures, which applies to any search for the truth at all, from that which is 'exact', which functions in terms of the prior framing characteristic of the natural sciences. The '*Geisteswissenchaften*, in contrast, in order to be *strict* must necessarily be *inexact*' (p. 150), which makes engaging in them more, not less, difficult, because there is no pre-established frame for the development of meaning in history.

It is not that philosophy, as Heidegger conceives it, is in favour of or opposes the sciences. He insists that the development of the sciences will not be changed by what happens in philosophy: 'The hidden goal which all this and other things are rushing towards, without in the least realizing or being able to realize it, is the state of complete boredom' (1989: 157), in which the world is emptied of emphatic sense. The example he gives is that '[t]he historical humanities [*Geisteswissenschaften*] become the *newspaper* sciences. The natural sciences become *machine* sciences' (p. 158). In *Aesthetic Theory* Adorno talks, in a manner analogous to Heidegger, of 'the grey of the boredom produced by the commodity world' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 375). The link here is again the dominance of quantifying forms: these are apparent in the nature of time in modern capitalism, which regiments the time of people's lives in terms of economic imperatives, rather than in terms of human flourishing. Heidegger asserts that 'the original, full truth of Being could only be based on time' (Heidegger 1989: 189). Time here is not expressible in terms of physics, because that depends on a prior interpretation which locates time within the frame of mathematization, but is rather the horizon of meaning for finite beings.

Heidegger does not, though, offer that much illumination of the ways in which time is the truth of Being, and the upshot of his reflections can remain obscure. One way of illustrating what Heidegger largely fails to show was already suggested by Georg Simmel in his *Philosophy of Money* (1900):

> with the rise of capitalism in Germany—when on the one hand world trade, on the other the finance centres with the rapid exchange of cheap money emerged—the modern concept of time first cut through, as a value determined by usefulness and shortage. At that time the clock towers began to strike the quarter hours. (Simmel n.d.: locs 10564–8)

Time becomes a quantifiable 'expensive commodity' (loc. 10564–8). This change does not depend on human intention, because the change that matters is systemic, and yet it changes the very nature of the world—note also the reference to rhythm, which one repeatedly encounters in such contexts:

> The life of earlier times appears bound rather to firmly given unities, which means nothing other than its emphatic rhythm, which modern time dissolves into an arbitrarily divisible continuum. The contents of life—as they are more and more expressible by absolutely continuous, unrhythmic money, which is inherently alien to every firmly circumscribed form—are,

> so to speak, dissected into such small parts that their rounded totalities are so smashed that every random synthesis and manipulation of them is possible. (Simmel n.d.: locs 5379–83)

Heidegger talks of the essence of truth as 'clearing concealing' [*lichtende Verbergung*] (Heidegger 1989: 189), which is evidently at odds with the objectified form of modern time characterized by Simmel; but he rarely makes substantial connections to socio-historical developments, and when he does he can move into very problematic territory.

This is most apparent in the following from the *Black Notebooks* of 1939–41: imperialism 'is driven towards a *final culmination* [*höchste Vollendung*] of technology. Its last act will be that the earth blows itself up and present humankind disappears. Which is not a misfortune [*Unglück*], but the first purification *of Being* from its deepest disfigurement [*Verunstaltung*] by the supremacy of entities' (Heidegger 2015: vol. xcvi, p. 238). It is, these days, increasingly conceivable that the culmination of misapplied technology will be the end of humankind. But the idea that this is a purification of Being from being disfigured by objectification takes anti-humanism to a bizarre extreme that suggests the failure of Heidegger to offer anything that mediates adequately between his philosophical conception and the realities of politics and history. In the light of such remarks, appeals to art start to appear empty.

Simmel underlines the link we have encountered before, between natural scientific laws and money: 'If the law, itself standing beyond all movements, yet represents their form and their basis, then the abstract value of property, which has not dispersed into individual values, and as whose carrier money subsists, is, so to speak, the soul and purpose of economic movements' (Simmel n.d.: locs 10682–4). The system of laws of nature transcends time, and the system of money transcends the individual things that it represents, which connects both to metaphysics. Heidegger says of the metaphysics of presence since Plato, which seeks to validate itself by its transcendence of time: 'Being the "most general" becomes the most essential determination of Being itself' (1989: 206).

It is here, then, that philosophy's relationship to art in modernity is vital: if the understanding of Being is not to be the 'most general', and not based on transcendence of temporality, ways of understanding being that respond to these new demands become crucial. The problem in Heidegger is that he says rather little, beyond the examples in the work of art essay, and sometimes questionable responses to the poetry of Hölderlin and others, about how actual art can disclose the world in non-objectifying ways. He does not

adequately engage with concrete manifestations of modern art and how they relate to philosophy's attempts to make sense of the world. What he says about Wagner in the Nietzsche texts, for example, is largely derived from the conception of music in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, and from some aspects of Nietzsche's own verdicts (see Bowie 2003: ch. 8), which means he offers few means for grasping the significance of Wagner's revolutionizing of musical form. With respect to the modernism of Baudelaire, Duchamp, the Second Viennese School, Kafka, Proust, or Samuel Beckett, Heidegger is silent.

In one sense Heidegger's failing is a product of his attachment to the idea of a complete reform of philosophy through focus on the question of Being. This leads to concentration on certain kinds of sense that too often can exclude adequate reflection on empirical, 'ontic' history of the kind present in Simmel's remarks about money. Thomas Sheehan sees the problem (Sheehan 2015: loc. 6909) as lying in Heidegger's assimilation of history to the history of philosophy, in sense of the history of being as manifested in the essential thinkers. Sheehan argues that Heidegger's 'etiology of *die Technik*' would only deserve taking seriously if 'the relation between his ontological history of being and the ontic course of lived history in its concrete material manifestations' (loc. 6989) were rethought. How, then, can a philosophy informed by serious historical attention to art develop an approach which engages with the effects of the focus on knowledge and control that is central to many forms of modern philosophy, and yet offers concrete critical perspectives of the kind Heidegger opens space for, but often fails to offer? For all the problems it involves, the work of T. W. Adorno offers some ways beyond Heidegger's flawed recasting of modern philosophy.

# 7

# The Dialectic of Modern Art

## T. W. Adorno

### Truth Content

Adorno opens his never completed *Aesthetic Theory* (*AT*) (first published posthumously in 1970) with the pronouncement: 'It has become taken for granted that nothing concerning art is to be taken for granted any more, neither in art nor in its relation to the whole, not even its right to exist' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 9).[1] In the wake of the failures of Western culture in relation to Nazism and Stalinism, and the World Wars, any means of making sense becomes open to question, and this includes art, but it also includes philosophy. Once again, it is not sceptical doubt with regard to knowledge claims that is the issue here, but rather concern with how the relationships to the world involved in the socioeconomic and technological issues we have been considering affect the possibilities of making sense. Although their perspectives on this differ fundamentally, especially with respect to politics and to modernist art, Adorno and Heidegger coincide in their attention to this concern.

*AT* does not explicitly define its key terms, which makes reconstructing its core arguments difficult. However, just reconstructing arguments from the text can underplay the way that *AT*'s form is part of its content, a situation which Adorno insists is also true of art. What makes modern aesthetic theory so difficult, and what leads Adorno to his ways of engaging in it, is that if it were to succeed, by establishing definitive theoretical accounts of the sense art makes, it would also fail, insofar as its object would be rendered superfluous by this success. Art's resistance to discursive ways of making sense—Adorno refers to its 'puzzle-character'—is part of what it is and of why it exists at all, and this resistance becomes crucial for his reflections on modern art. At the same time, if philosophy renounces the attempt to take account of the meanings of art, art itself can be diminished. The illumination to be gained

[1] The text was compiled after Adorno's death, so is very much 'work in progress'.

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from responding to art in the light of Kant's *Critique of Judgement* or Hegel's *Aesthetics*, for example, would be lost.

Adorno thinks that this impasse is not simply a theoretical issue that applies to all art, but is itself a result of the historical developments we have been considering in the preceding chapters. These developments also raise questions about the appropriate form for the presentation of philosophy. The manner of Wittgenstein's later philosophy indicates the issue here: rather than just presenting arguments, the style and form of Wittgenstein's investigations are part of what his texts 'say' about the ideas explored. *AT* offers a related, if different, example of the form of philosophy being a response to limitations of positive arguments on a specific topic, especially when the topic is as inherently dynamic and temporalized as art.

Given that modernist art from Baudelaire, Wagner, Manet, and others onwards often subverts many of the ways in which art previously made sense, it falls to philosophy to respond to why this is the case, while also taking account of the ways that art cannot be reduced to what philosophy says about it:

> Hegel's thought that 'the science of art is thus more of a need for us than art itself' is the no doubt problematic product of his hierarchical view of the relationship of the realms of spirit to each other; on the other hand, the assertion has its prophetic truth in the fact that, in the face of the increasingly theoretical interest in art, art needs philosophy for the sake of the unfolding of its own content. (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, pp. 140–41)

Changes in modern philosophy and art mean that their relationship is unstable, and aesthetic theory has to respond to that situation in both its form and its content. Without theoretical reflection, art is likely to be susceptible to becoming a form of ideology; with it, there is a danger of failing to be open to new ways of responding to the world. There is, for Adorno, no simple way out of this situation.

Like Heidegger, Adorno connects art to truth in a manner not covered by semantic conceptions: 'The truth of works of art is dependent on whether they succeed in absorbing in its inner necessity that which is not identical with the concept, which is contingent in the terms of the concept' (p. 155). This evidently needs some unpacking. The initial point relates to the issues concerning identity we looked at in earlier chapters. Adorno's concern with 'non-identity' derives from his view that the modern world is primarily constituted by forms of identification, from the commodity form to natural

scientific theories, which, while being necessary for constituting an intelligible world—in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno insists that 'thinking means identifying' (1997: vol. vi, p. 7)—can also be a source of repression. The labelling of a person in ethnic terms, their language, etc., makes the danger clear: they can be reduced to being a mere instance of a concept, and thus be at risk of being treated as such. Identification is crucial to human survival and flourishing, but it can also be the first step towards something appalling. Adorno predicates his philosophy on the 'new categorical imperative' that people 'organize their thinking and action in such a way that Auschwitz does not repeat itself' (p. 358). Part of what made Auschwitz possible can be understood in terms of the dangers of repressive identification, and the question is what forms of expression and articulation can avoid such dangers, and how they do so.

It might be argued that there will always be other concepts available, which can be used to escape reduction by classification, so that any generalization about concepts and identification overshoots the mark. Herbert Schnädelbach differentiates, as we saw in relation to Nietzsche, between identification of something *as* something and identification of something *with* something else, where the dangers of the latter are greater than of the former. Adorno, though, wants to explore the ways in which concepts have been used in modernity have demonstrably given rise to the repressive functioning of identification. Leibniz argued, as we saw, that no two things are identical, so that the only strict identity is of a thing with itself. In order to get round the implications of this for knowledge—which would be impossible in such terms—Kant made identity a function of thinking, and so locates it on the side of the subject. For Adorno, rather as for Heidegger in his view of Descartes, this move can open the door to forms of identification in which the subject seeks to dominate the 'other', be that the natural world or other subjects.

In this respect, the truth of works of art lies in the possibilities which they establish for relating to things in non-identifying ways. One can open up aspects of the world by not seeking just to re-present them. Wittgenstein maintains: 'The poet too must always ask themselves: "is what I write always true?"—which doesn't have to mean "does it happen like this in reality?"' (Wittgenstein 1980: 40). The 'inner necessity' which works of art have to 'absorb' is, then, constituted by what matters about things that may not be classifiable through concepts. Paintings which capture something about their subject that cannot be put into words, like Rembrandt's later self-portraits, can suggest what is meant here. The paintings are in one sense about 'ageing', but saying this does little to account for why they can hold our attention so emphatically.

Adorno's approach to art and aesthetics questions fundamental ideas about how language and truth are to be understood. Consider the following: 'What works say through the configuration of their elements means something objectively different in different periods, and that ultimately affects their truth content' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, pp. 288–9). The 'truth content' of a work of art cannot, therefore, be what is articulated in true statements about the work in isolation from its world. No doubt one can make factual statements about a work which are not subject to such changes, e.g. about the key-relations in a piece by Beethoven, but that would miss the point of what Adorno means by 'truth content'. The question is how and why those key relations arise out of limitations in previous music, and how they affect what is possible in subsequent music. Adorno refuses to see changes in the meaning of art as entailing that what a work means is merely subjective projection or ideology which can change according to historical contingency. So what is 'truth content'?

Truth content derives from the way differing elements of a work are 'configured', thus how the relationships between the elements come to make the particular sense they do in a work. Aspects of a work of art which reveal new sense at the time of its production can cease to do so at a later time, but the work may become meaningful for other reasons. Adorno cites Beethoven's innovative use of the diminished seventh chord in the Appassionata sonata, which at the time of composition had a shock-effect, but later becomes a cliché in salon music. Listened to in the context of the sonata, the shock effect of the diminished chord may still be appreciated in some measure, but it may no longer be central to the work's truth content. That content can instead come to inhere in the way the opening movement avoids an unambiguous resolution, in contrast to the tendency in other works by Beethoven in that period to convey fulfilment. Adorno also gives the example of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels of adultery, which lose their impact as the nature of relationships and the family in the Western world change. The reason a novel like *Madame Bovary* still has truth content is that 'the authentic aspect of *Madame Bovary*, which was once sunk in its material [i.e. of adultery] has surpassed this material and its demise' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, pp. 13–14). The content now resides, for instance, in the novel appearing to be an example of realism and yet undermining the conventions of realism through its style, and in what this tells us about relationships to the objective world in nineteenth-century society. Truth content is not articulated at the level of making individual statements about the work; it emerges instead by locating the work in historical and other contexts, and by engaging with its specificity.

The interplay between concepts, arising from immersion in the work, is what enables its truth content to be manifest: 'Art has its concept in the constellation of moments which changes with history; it resists definition' (p. 11). This is why the content can differ at different times, and why the notion of saying anything definitive about a work is not the aim. The text of *AT* can itself be seen in such terms, in that none of its core concepts are straightforwardly defined, and their shades of meaning vary in terms of the context in which they appear. This might seem an odd way to theorize, in that many of the usual aims of theory seem not to apply. However, if a theory is to be adequate to the experience of art, it cannot base itself on assumptions that may be inimical to that experience. Moreover, something of the kind applies to any attempt to interpret many complex phenomena in the world. Rather than begin, say, with a definition of 'love', before seeking to understand it, one might read Proust's novel, where, as we saw, the shades of meaning of the term keep shifting and so constitute a more effective way of responding to something which resists full understanding. Some of the later Wittgenstein's explorations of the use of language and of the ways meaning is constituted in contexts of action are congruent with Adorno's reflections.

In certain respects Adorno echoes the Romantic ideas we examined in Chapter 3 (his familiarity with Walter Benjamin's *Concept of Art Criticism in German Romanticism* is probably a factor in this see Bowie 1997: ch. 8). Art is here not significant because it conveys something timeless, but because it cannot be reduced to one of its interpretations, and can, however discontinuously, unfold in time. Rather than leading to a mere subjectivist relativism, though, the demands made by adequate engagement with art make it clear that an 'anything goes' stance is mistaken:

> That people continually get entangled in aesthetic disputes, no matter which position they occupy with respect to aesthetics, proves more against relativism than its philosophical refutations: the idea of aesthetic truth gains its justification despite its difficulty and in that difficulty. Criticism of aesthetic relativism gains its strongest support in the decidability of technical questions. (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 419)

Getting things right in art is not arbitrary: it involves criteria, but these can change, and can be disputed. Without them, though, the commitment to art in so many social contexts, which generates the aesthetic disputes, makes no sense. The demand to get it right, and the fact that great art can get it right, suggest the importance of what art can articulate, and the difficulty involved

in doing so does not detract from the demand—on the contrary. The continuing role of art in establishing aesthetic demands, even though there are no perennial criteria or guarantees of success, is the key here. Again, Monk's 'Wrong is right' is germane to the question of truth in art. Monk's own music helped established a new way of seeing how 'wrong notes' could work in the service of expressing something inaccessible or repressed, as (to take one of Adorno's central examples) did the music of the Second Viennese School.

The rightness in question can, for example, be understood as akin to the rightness that is achieved by making a gesture or giving a look that successfully establishes or changes a relationship with another person. In *Culture and Value*, Wittgenstein says: 'Architecture is a *gesture*. Not every purposive gesture of the human body is a gesture. Just as little as every building built for a purpose is architecture' (Wittgenstein 1980: 43), and in the *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief*, he says: 'The mistake seems to me in the idea of description. […] with some people, me especially, the expression of an emotion in music, say, is a certain gesture' (Wittgenstein 1966: 37). What is at issue here cannot be fully articulated in verbal terms—though the rightness of verbal utterances can be of the same nature when it depends more on its tone or rhythm than its propositional content—because the specific meaning inheres in the actual gesture, look, or utterance. These kinds of discrimination of expression can sometimes be learned as a guide to future communication; but the vital fact is that they also involve a spontaneity which is based on previous experience, but is not predetermined by that experience.

## Mimesis, Art, and Nature

Adorno gives a central role to 'mimesis' in distinguishing art from other forms of articulation and expression. What he means can initially be understood in anthropological terms: mimesis is present in behaviour in rituals which try to control nature, thus in an active, participatory relationship to the world, rather than an objectifying cognitive relationship. The thing imitated in such rituals and the behaviour may not be clearly related from an external perspective—for instance in the case of ritual dances relating to hunting—but they can also be representational in, say, paintings of animals to be hunted. Adorno insists that art is *Schein*, 'appearance/illusion/semblance', which means it can both be deceptive and yet also offer possibilities for things as yet unrealized. Modern social reality itself, though, is a 'context of delusion'

(*Verblendungszusammenhang*) occasioned by the distorting effects of capital and instrumental reason. It is precisely the resistance of serious art to the nature of modern reality which gives it its significance: 'In the administered world the adequate form in which artworks are received is the communication of the uncommunicable, the breaching of reified consciousness' (1997: vol. vii, p. 292). Reified consciousness, as we saw in Chapter 5, can block out affective, non-objectifying relations to the world. Mimesis, in contrast, arises through immediate affective responses to a world which constantly threatens the survival of living beings—it can be seen in the animal kingdom—and this distinguishes it from objectifying relations, such as knowledge, even though both may aim at self-preservation. Mimesis is 'closer to nature', but Adorno also insists that 'nature' itself has to be understood historically, rather than being something original or perennial (see Bowie 2013: ch. 4).

Nature, for Adorno, is not Kant's 'formal' system of timeless laws, but rather what emerges through relationships involving the constitution of an 'other'. The point is that everything, including consciousness, is 'nature' in one sense. What comes to be regarded as nature must, though, involve a split, like that involved in the relationship between 'mind' and 'world', or where we distinguish between impulses that are not rationally controlled and rational reflection. There is a history of nature which radically changes what nature is, from being, for example, God's creation, to being a mechanical system, to now being what can be threatened by human action. This history is not wholly dissimilar to Heidegger's idea of a history of Being, in the sense that both approaches involve a frame of intelligibility which is prior to what can be conceptually grasped. Art's relationship to nature is characterized by Adorno as 'mimesis driven to consciousness of itself': art is 'bound to the impulse, the immediacy of experience; otherwise it would be indistinguishable from science' (1997: vol. vii, pp. 384–5). Without this moment of immediacy, which evades classification in terms of already established forms of articulation, art would, as Hegel thought, come to an end as an essential way of understanding the world.

At the same time, mimesis is not merely irrational: 'Mimesis that lives on, the nonconceptual affinity of what is subjectively produced to its other, which is not posited [as it would be in conceptual knowledge, which involves objectification], determines art as a form of cognition, and as such for its part as "rational" ' (pp. 86–7). Art, then, involves 'knowledge' which is non-conceptual and is manifested in relationships to things which make sense of the world

without classifying it:[2] 'Art is […] neither, as cognition, discursive, nor is its truth the reflection of an object' (p. 419). This is not about 'knowing how', as opposed to 'knowing that', because the affinity to things in question can bring new ways of relating to the world into being: 'Art is admittedly imitation, but not of an object, but an attempt, through all its gestures and its whole attitude, to restore a state in which the difference of subject and object did not exist' (Adorno 2009: 70). Think once more of rhythm, which is vital to orienting oneself in a world, and is present both in the world and in the subject, thus in both 'nature' and consciousness. Rhythm's capacity to induce ecstatic states where intentional consciousness is suspended, and the fact that rhythm can also involve highly differentiated complexity that is akin to the most complex forms of conceptual thought, suggest the dimensions that Adorno is seeking to elucidate.

In a related vein, Adorno says that music

> is, as it were, the acoustic objectification of facial expression, which perhaps only separated itself from it in the course of history. If 'a shadow passes over a face', an eye opens, lips half-open, then that is closest to the origin of music as well as to expressionless natural beauty. (Adorno 2001: 237)

The transformation of facial expression into acoustic form—Wittgenstein suggests something analogous: 'A theme has no less a facial expression than does a face' (Wittgenstein 1980: 52)—enables this form to be developed in new directions, by engaging with the resources of music available at a particular time. Those resources can, though, lose their capacity to 'say' anything significant, and so become part of the context of delusion. Adorno sees this as happening in the commodification of music in the 'culture industry', when, for example, standardized song forms become part of a more and more standardized world.[3]

Music evidently relates to ways that gestures, looks, and bodily expressions manifest emotions, but reducing music to being predominantly the expression of emotion makes it impossible to understand much of music's development,

[2] Whole books are written on what counts as 'conceptual': here the sense involves something like Kant's idea of concepts as rules for identifying objects. The point is that art need not entail such identification, even though it makes things intelligible in other ways.

[3] Adorno fails to see, though, how improvised jazz, while using these forms as a frame, also radically transforms them and involves the same demand for innovation as Adorno attributes to 'new music' (see Bowie 2020).

and can involve questionable conceptions of emotion. The ways that supposedly 'garden variety' emotions are expressed in music change very radically across history, which suggests that the very notion of standard kinds of emotion is suspect, because emotions are world-involving, not just internal events (see the Conclusion). Music can, moreover, bring new kinds of emotion into being. Purcell's 'Dido's Lament' and the last movement of Tchaikovsky's Pathétique Symphony could in a very loose sense be said to involve related emotions, but the form of expression in the pieces and their historical contexts are indispensable to an adequate understanding of the emotions evoked by the music, as opposed to a mere classification according to a limited repertoire of psychological labels.

Adorno sees aesthetic form as 'the non-violent synthesis of the dispersed, which yet preserves it as that which it is, in its divergence and in its contradictions, and for this reason is really an unfolding of truth' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 216). As with the dispersed elements of *AT* themselves, the point is how relations and connections between elements are configured. The sort of synthesis in question can be illustrated by the history of increasing dissonance in Western music, where different syntheses of notes can make sense of what previously was senseless noise. Adorno contends that the modern world involves coercive synthesis, of the kind present in the commodity form forcing identity onto differing things, and that '[w]orks of art are the place-holders of things that are no longer disfigured by exchange, of what is not ravaged by profit and the false need of debased humanity' (p. 337). Once again art embodies a contradiction: 'The double character of art as something that separates itself from empirical reality and thereby from interdependence with society, which yet at the same time falls into empirical reality and interdependence with society, manifests itself directly in aesthetic phenomena. These are both, aesthetic, and *faits sociaux*' (p. 375). Art works can be commodities, but their truth is manifest in how they oppose the commodity principle. As such, they inherently involve contradiction, and this is echoed in the way Adorno sees them as both opposed to the given, yet also inextricably entangled with it.

Art works can reveal what is repressed by distorted relationships to nature, but at the same time, they cannot themselves wholly escape the distortion: it is part of what they are as *faits sociaux*. As Albrecht Wellmer has suggested (Wellmer 1985), Adorno's approach here is weakened by his idea of a 'reconciliation' with nature which is manifested, but only as appearance, in art. The problem is that if one sees antagonisms between humankind and the natural world as unavoidable, because of the need for self-preservation, the best we may be able to do is seek to minimize the damage done to the world. The less

theologically tinged idea that art can reveal distorted relationships to nature has, though, taken on greater actuality as the threat of ecological disaster becomes more and more pressing.

## Subject and Object

The question is *why* repressive forms come to dominate, which Adorno thinks has to do with the nature of the subject. He sees subjectivity here in terms of self-preservation, as that which seeks to sustain itself against threats from the rest of nature. This is what makes nature into the 'other' which has to be dominated. However, the subject itself—here he follows a psychoanalytic model—has to repress its own nature in order to achieve this, subordinating impulses to the discipline of work, and so instituting psychological and social repression. This constitutes another version of 'second nature', where structures and forms of organization established by subjects function as a threat to those subjects in the same way as does 'first nature'.

Subjective responses to art are themselves often demonstrably the result of objective social factors, such as marketing, however much the person whose response it is experiences their judgement as their own. There is, though, no position from which an individual can be 'objectively' certain that they are not themself subject to ideological pressure. At the same time, experiences of successful aesthetic education, where initiation into critical reflection on aesthetic value brings about greater aesthetic discrimination, involve demands that are not arbitrarily subjective, and can free one from unjustified prejudices. The very fact that aesthetic education challenges one's received judgements is a form of encounter with objectivity. On the one hand, then, if art works did not involve the subject's feelings, they would not engage the subject; on the other, the affects involved can be the product of objective social factors.

Adorno distinguishes between using a pop song, 'as a screen for all sorts of psychological projections' and understanding a work 'by subordinating oneself to its own discipline' (1997: vol. vii, p. 396). Such self-subordination counters the impulse to domination which he sees as the core of modern subjectivity. He is concerned to explore the relationships the subject can develop which do not take the other (be it non-human nature or other subjects) as an object opposed to itself. This has implications for a familiar issue. The role of scepticism in modern thought is premised precisely on the idea of the 'other', in the broadest sense, as being potentially wholly opposed to the cognitive subject. Adorno, then, also suggests that the root of modern scepticism

cannot be understood just in terms of establishing certainty of knowledge. To develop such new kinds of relationship to the other, the subject must have the experience of opening itself to something which makes its own sense, rather than having sense projected onto it from the perspective of the subject.

Instead of aesthetic pleasure being the primary factor here, the key is *Erschütterung*, being 'shaken' or 'unsettled' by art. Adorno relates what he intends to Kant's sublime, where the subject confronts natural phenomena that overwhelm the capacity of its senses to apprehend them, and so transcends nature through the realization of the limits of its senses. However: 'Spirit becomes less aware of the nature of its own superiority in the way Kant would like, than of its own being part of nature [*Naturhaftigkeit*]' (p. 410). By this 'remembrance of nature' through art, the subject 'steps, in spirit, outside imprisonment in itself. Something of the freedom lights up which philosophy reserves, in a culpable error, for the arrogance of the subject' (p. 410). Rather than freedom being seen just in terms of self-determination through norms, where the danger is that the norms can be ideological products of the subject's drive for control, or a form of repression, freedom becomes a new openness to the other. Once again, then, the key factor is the possibility of different relationships to the other, which make new meaning possible, not wholesale command of the other.

The focus on such relationships explains why Adorno is largely concerned with art that breaks new ground, and why he is critical of many kinds of popular culture. Although he acknowledges that popular culture's appeal can be legitimate, his concern is that it dominates cultural reception via mechanisms deriving from the market. The central idea in the subject's being shaken in art is

> the consciousness that it is not the ultimate thing, that it is itself appearance [*scheinhaft*]. That transforms art for the subject into what art is in itself, the historical advocate [*Sprecher*] of oppressed nature, in the final analysis critical of the ego-principle, the inner agent of oppression. Subjective experience against the I is a moment of objective truth in art.
>
> (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, pp. 364–5)

By being shaken, the I 'becomes aware of its own limitation and finitude'. Engagement with art takes the subject beyond itself. Adorno himself tends to deal with this issue in very broad terms, like the idea of oppressed nature as being given a voice in art; but even more everyday involvement with art as producer or recipient is not always best seen in terms of aesthetic pleasure.

Coming to understand art that may initially make no sense, like atonal music, can open dimensions of sense that change one's attitude to the world. Likewise, learning a musical instrument, which can never be definitively mastered, is both difficult and often humbling, and yet is also a route to new experiences of interaction with the world that can become indispensable in making sense of one's life.

This last example may seem to contradict Adorno's claims, in that learning an instrument, learning the craft of writing or painting, etc. are forms of seeking mastery or command. Adorno responds to this in dialectical terms: 'The opposition of works of art against domination is mimesis of domination. They have to become like dominating behaviour, in order to produce something that is qualitatively different from the world of domination' (p. 430). He sums up this dialectical move as follows: 'While the unity of works of art derives from the violence reason does to things, at the same time it brings about the reconciliation of the moments of the works of art' (p. 454). He proposes an analogy between technological development as the subject's attempt to master nature, and the development of technical resources in art: 'aesthetic progress within art, which is progress of the forces of production as well as of technique, is related to progress of the forces of production outside art' (p. 56). For Adorno: 'There is no question that the historical materials, and command of them: technique, progress; discoveries like that of perspective in painting and polyphony in music are the crudest examples of that' (p. 313). The possibilities for artistic production are extended by this progress in technique, but Adorno is also insistent that 'technique does not circumscribe the whole of art'; it is 'the determinable figure of the puzzle in works of art, rational and conceptless in one' (p. 317). Technique involves rules and getting it right according to them, but in art there are no rules for what the successful use of rules reveals, and rules can be revised or initiated.

The relationship between technique and mimesis is a key element of Adorno's reflections: 'The tension between objectivizing technique and the mimetic nature of works of art is carried out in the effort to save for all time the fleeting, the hastily departing, the transient, as something immune to reification and joined to it' (pp. 325–6). The very nature of art is therefore contradictory: it seeks what transcends time in appearances which themselves manifest the experience of time as transience. The conclusion of Mahler's Ninth Symphony, for example, enacts the final moments of life in a form which seeks to preserve those moments and gives them significance in defiance of the nothingness they lead to. Such works 'are a way of knowing which is not the knowing of an object', they 'understand the incomprehensible'

(p. 516). Technical resources are required for Mahler's conclusion which were not present in that form until the scope of expression is widened by Romantic music, but what becomes expressible by the command of these resources is precisely the loss of command inherent in finite human life. This understanding is 'mimetic': consolation in the face of the necessity of death is enacted by fitting gestures. There is something akin to normativity involved here, but the norms in question cannot be formulated in general terms, and can only be understood by participation in specific forms of art. Moreover, when Hegel saw art as 'the consciousness of afflictions [*Nöten*]', he can now be seen as revealing why 'the end of art which he forecast has not taken place in the 150 years since' (p. 309), because, as Habermas suggested in relation to 'what is lacking', philosophy does not adequately respond to afflictions in a secularized world.

Death is the reminder that we are a transient part of nature like any other entity. However, even death, like nature, has a history, and modernity changes the very character of death: 'since Auschwitz, being afraid of death means fearing what is worse than death' (Adorno 1997: vol. vi, p. 360). Appalling genocides have been a part of much of human history, but Auschwitz happens at a point in history where the means of obviating many of the worst forms of human suffering really exist, and it happens via technological command of the means of annihilation. As a result, any sense of human progress in establishing a meaningful world is put in question, and art has to reflect this fact, rather than continuing a pretence of redemption from the worst. The philosophy which secularized Providence into the idea of progress and perfectibility was shaken in the eighteenth century by the earthquake at Lisbon, and when second nature produces a far worse catastrophe in the Holocaust, the effects are more devastating to philosophical attempts to make sense: 'Already before Auschwitz it was an affirmative lie in the face of historical experiences to attribute any positive sense to existence. That has consequences right into the form of works of art. […] As works of art ever more relentlessly sound out the context which founds meaning, they turn against it and against any meaning' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 229) . Trying to give meaning to such experiences may encourage responses to the world which neglect and perpetuate suffering, rather than protesting against it.

## Form and Sense

Modern art that aspires to make sense of a world that produced the Holocaust seems, then, to have to do so by precisely no longer making sense. This

contradiction is central to Adorno's conception of art and philosophy. A way of thinking about what is at issue here is in terms of mourning. Mourning cannot change the objective reality of the lack of what is mourned, and it might be said that it therefore makes no sense. However, the enactment of mourning can enable people to move on in the hope of future sense. The forms in which something is acknowledged can change how it affects the future. At the same time, what is involved here cannot be made fully explicit by aesthetic theory. It inheres in the involvement with specific mimetic forms of enactment: 'The paradox that art says it and yet doesn't say it is based on the fact that the mimetic, via which it says it, at the same time opposes the saying of it, as something opaque and particular' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 305). A significant part, particularly of Anglo-American, 'philosophy of art', neglects what is at issue here, because it relies on an observational, objectifying perspective—hence its concern with 'conceptual analysis', the ontological status of art objects, etc.—whereas what Adorno points to demands specific forms of participation in art which resist the abstraction that is part of such analysis.

Objectification relies on forms of identity imposed by the subject, thus on what is expressed in conceptual terms, whereas art, even as it must involve identity, gains its value from the particularity of its objects in ways which both respect this particularity and reveal something new: 'Works of art relate to the objective need for a change of consciousness which could overflow into changing reality by […] changing the light on the familiar, which they tend to do of their own accord' (p. 361). Elsewhere Adorno talks of the 'character of art as unconscious writing of history, anamnesis of the inferior, the repressed, of what is perhaps possible' (p. 384), thus of the subject as a piece of living nature, not just as what dominates both its own and objective nature. This can be understood, for example, via Kafka's story *The Metamorphosis/ Transformation* (*Die Verwandlung*), where the transformation of Gregor Samsa into a giant bug (*Ungeziefer*) makes no empirical sense, as this cannot happen in reality, but is also not simply a metaphor that can be cashed out in literal terms. Clearly the story has to do with forms of alienation––from exhausting work to alienation from one's own body and family––but the story can, by being opposed to empirical reality, open new ways of seeing. Such art is 'precisely not a representation, not a reproduction of that state [of alienation]. In art's denunciation of it, in its transposition of it into the imago it becomes its Other and thus free, in a way forbidden to the living by the state of alienation' (p. 386). In this way Adorno suggests how we can be motivated and engaged by art even as it reveals the lack of freedom in our world.

Art achieves what Adorno suggests by renouncing discursive forms, and this leads to the following dilemma: 'The pressing reason for the social ineffectiveness of works of art today that don't assign themselves to crude propaganda is that they, in order to resist the all-powerful system of communication, have to renounce the means of communication which would perhaps bring them to the people' (p. 360). The communication Adorno thinks art refuses is associated in particular with metaphysics which would even seek to make sense out of humanly created catastrophe. Art that refuses such sense is philosophically most significant:

> The key to contemporary anti-art, with Beckett as its pinnacle, may be the idea of concretizing that negation [of sense]; to discern something aesthetically meaningful in the relentless negation of metaphysical sense. The aesthetic principle of form is in itself, by synthesis of what is formed, the positing of sense, even where sense is repudiated by content.
>
> (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 403)

For Adorno, then, historical catastrophe destroys the former role of art as, in Stendhal's phrase about beauty, a *promesse du bonheur*, leaving only the demands of artistic form as establishing sense that is distanced from the actual state of the world.

The truth content of such art is 'that in appearance which is not appearance' (p. 423): the core of why art matters for Adorno is therefore presented in paradoxical terms. However, if we think of art as a form of world-disclosure, and keep in mind the fact that forms of access to and articulation of the world need not be primarily understood in terms of representation, what aesthetic appearance discloses is not the appearing phenomenon itself, but what it reveals that would otherwise not be manifest. We encountered a similar view in Cassirer with respect to the analogies between language and art, where the graphic or sonic phenomenon 'recedes completely in relation to what it mediately achieves and "says". The concrete individual elements of which the work of art is constructed also clearly demonstrate this basic relationship' (Cassirer 1994: vol. i, p. 27). At the same time: 'What transcends is not without that which it transcends' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 424). The vital aspect is therefore how art transcends its material, which is why Adorno sees aesthetic form as 'sedimented content' (p. 15), and why this is a fundamentally historical issue.

The modernist revolt against previous ways of making sense in art, and the intensification of this in the light of the Holocaust, do not invalidate Adorno's account of the centrality of form in art. The forms of art of the past are

'paradigms of dialectic. Depending on what is formed, they modify themselves; with the radicalization in modernism they do so throughout by negation: they have an indirect effect by the fact that they are avoided, suspended; prototypically the relationship to the received rules of the composition of pictures since Manet' (p. 432; on Manet, see Pippin 2012). Once again, Monk's 'Wrong is right' encapsulates the issue: instead of communicating according to established norms, these norms are suspended, which means they are necessary for what art seeks to articulate, but as that which is, in Hegel's phrase, 'determinately negated'. This does not, however, lead, as it does in Hegel, to new positive norms: 'Art is the test of the prohibition of positive negation: that the negation of the negative is not the positive, not the reconciliation with an object that is not itself reconciled' (p. 478). Adorno explains this further when he talks of the 'history of art, which inexorably moved dissonance into centre stage to the point of abolishing its difference from consonance' (p. 512) in atonal music. By not seeking to harmonize its content, art sustains contact with suffering which might otherwise be ignored or repressed by being sublimated in aesthetic appearance: that is why beauty is no longer the central aspect of such art, and why art has to keep changing.

## Forms of Understanding

We have already encountered a core problem with regard to the relationship between art and philosophy: if philosophy's job is to explain the sense of art, success at this seems to point to the end of art, as was apparent in Hegel's hierarchy of forms of spirit in his system. If, as Schelling claimed in the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, art is the 'organon of philosophy', the problem is what philosophy itself should look like, given that discursive means are not adequate to grasp what art brings about in relation to metaphysical issues. Adorno's response to this is enacted by the dialectical manner of his theorizing: there is no simple way of summarizing it. Once one sees both art and philosophy as sense-making practices, rather than just as means of representing the truth about the world, such a mode of theorizing looks less implausible than it might first appear. Underlying Adorno's approach is something similar to what Heidegger sees in terms of 'unconcealment', in which approaches to grasping the world inherently both disclose and conceal. As such, both art and philosophy may obscure or repress, even as they also make manifest. If philosophy involves what Heidegger sees as the reduction of the world to being an object of a dominating subject, this gives rise to the need for what

resists objectification. Adorno sees this in terms of allowing repressed 'nature' to speak, which is why art depends on mimesis.

The respective roles of art and philosophy here are not fixed. One of the key moments in the history of their relationship looks like this: 'Works of art share with idealist philosophy that they shift reconciliation into identity with the subject; in this such philosophy, as it expressly does in Schelling, actually has art as its model, not the other way round' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 120). By formally reconciling conflicting elements, works of art embody the idealist drive for systematic resolution of contradictions between subject and object. In Adorno's version of the subject–object relationship, the modern period is characterized by thought seeking ever more dominance of nature. Art can therefore no longer just seek reconciliation of conflicting elements, in the manner of a sonata returning to the home key after departing from it and so making sense of the preceding material of the sonata. In refusing reconciliation by the resolution of dissonance or by formal closure, modern art is a response to philosophy which is defined by the aim of resolving the dissonance between mind and world exemplified in scepticism. So what kind of philosophy is now the alternative?

The alternative would at first sight seem to be a philosophy which somehow advocates liberation from the repressive aspect of concepts, which reduce things to limited forms of identity. However, Adorno—and in this he remains Hegelian—thinks this involves an appeal to 'immediacy', which takes art outside of the 'space of reasons', thus out of what can be argued about in social and cultural terms. In consequence, he seeks, in a manner related to some of the later Wittgenstein's and pragmatism's understanding of language, to think about concepts in a different way:

> If non-aesthetic cognition, in Kant's formulation, asked about the possibility of the universal judgement, every work of art asks how something particular is at all possible under the domination of the universal. That binds aesthetics, however little its method can be one of subsumption under abstract concepts, to concepts, admittedly, though, ones whose telos is the particular.
>
> (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 521)

In this sense such 'concepts' are no longer forms of identification, but forms of understanding, and they relate to mimetic practices:

> The musician who understands their score, follows its minimal movements and yet in a certain sense does not know what they are playing; the same is true of the actor, and precisely in this that the mimetic capacity manifests

> itself in the most emphatic way in the praxis of artistic representation, as imitation of the curve of movement of what is represented; it is the epitome of understanding this side of the puzzle-character. (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 189)

The understanding of music, as orchestral conductors show, and as Wittgenstein contends, can often best be manifested in gestures, in the same way as interpersonal understanding can sometimes be best attained through non-verbal means. As such, 'the cognition which art is separates itself from conceptual cognition: what is essentially mimetic expects mimetic behaviour' (p. 190), such as that exhibited by actors, conductors and instrumentalists, and this behaviour can be very precise.

The philosophy which Adorno intends is 'thinking behaviour which does not break off in terms of prescriptions dictated by a division of labour' (p. 520). He could not, then, be further from an analytical approach based on 'conceptual analysis', because what counts for him is not circumscribing terms like 'expression', 'representation', and the like, but seeing how such terms interact, and what each may conceal that others may reveal. Above all, art keeps open space which does not see the world as predominantly an object to be grasped, and so offers ways of responding to what resists conceptual comprehension:

> Whoever just moves knowingly [*verständnisvoll*] in art makes it into something taken for granted [*selbstverständlich*], and that is the last thing it is. If someone tries to get very close to the rainbow, it disappears. Prototypical for this is, before the other arts, music, which is a complete puzzle and completely obvious at the same time. The riddle is not to be solved, only its form is to be deciphered, and that is down to the philosophy of art. Someone would only understand music who heard it as just as alien as would an unmusical person, and as just as familiar as the language of the birds to [Wagner's] Siegfried. (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 185)

However much a philosophy may achieve which immerses itself in art and seeks to explicate it in terms apt to a work of art's specificity, it must also incorporate its inability to master the puzzle-character of art. The sense of incompletion in *AT* is, then, not something that would have been dispelled had Adorno been able to complete the text.

In his work on music, Adorno will often highlight just what makes something in a piece remarkable, such as Beethoven's addition of two A-major chords 'fetched up as if out of unfathomable depths' to the opening F# minor theme of the slow movement of his 'Hammerklavier' sonata. Adorno insists that we

can't finally say what it is that makes these chords, which are just chords in the relative major key, so important, and yet, if we grasp the work's significance by immersing ourselves in it, we can't deny their importance either. What is at issue here is in one sense like a joke: the explanation of a joke can be true, but it can mean that the joke no longer functions as a joke, because the experience and effect of its specific form is lost in the explanation. Adorno's concern is not to replace philosophical explanation of art, but to reveal its limits, and to focus on modes of attention that philosophy can elide by a too exclusive focus on cognition. He sees the development of philosophy, for example, as diminishing the capacity for amazement, such that: 'Art seeks, weakly, as if with a rapidly tiring gesture, to rectify this. It makes people amazed a priori, in the way that in former times Plato demanded from philosophy, which decided to do the opposite' (p. 191).

Given the historical developments we have been following, modern philosophy cannot simply escape the demands of critical reflection and revive the capacity for amazement. At the same time, the remains of amazement in art must involve the critical reflection that Adorno sees as part of the task of philosophical aesthetics: 'genuine aesthetic experience has to become philosophy, as otherwise it does not exist. The condition of possibility of the convergence of philosophy and art is to be sought in the moment of universality which art possesses in its specification—as a language sui generis' (p. 197). That 'language', which involves the 'mimetic impulse', cannot be translated into universal philosophical concepts, but philosophy can show how it relates to its historical and social contexts, and the language can itself come to express something universal that is experienced in its reception. Were this not the case, it would be impossible to explain the emergence and reception of the revelatory works which change what is expected of art, and can render some previous art obsolete.

The tension Adorno grapples with here is suggested when he says: 'Specifically aesthetic experience, losing oneself in works of art, is not concerned with their genesis. Knowledge of this is as external to them as the history of the dedication of the Eroica is to what happens musically in it' (p. 267). Losing oneself entails an 'immediacy' that points in the direction of irrationalism or mysticism, and some theories, often associated with reactionary politics, indeed point in this direction.[4] However, in line with his dialectical approach, Adorno makes it clear that this moment has to coexist with the effort of engaging with art both intellectually and emotionally, to the

[4] As suggested in the title of Ludwig Klages' 1929 *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* [Spirit as the Opponent of Soul].

point where one can lose the need for control based on pre-existing forms of response.

Philosophy, for Adorno, has lost sight of what is entailed in this dialectic with respect to art, and this has consequences for the contemporary practice of philosophy:

> Aesthetics presents philosophy with the bill for the fact that the academic enterprise degraded it to being just a sector. Aesthetics demands of philosophy what it neglects: that it take phenomena out of their sheer existence and make them reflect on themselves. Reflection on what is ossified in the sciences, not its own science apart from them. […] Every work of art needs, in order to be fully experienced, thought, and with it philosophy, which is nothing but thought which does not allow itself to have the brakes applied to it. Understanding is one with critique; the capacity to understand, to become aware of what is understood as imbued with intelligibility [*als eines Geistigen*] is not different from distinguishing true and false in it, however much this distinction has to deviate from the procedure of ordinary logic.
>
> (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 391)

Once again there is here a normativity which cannot be expressed in terms of explicit conceptual norms. The key problem is that in art 'one experiences something singular, something particular in its necessity, without the universal which would guarantee this universality being positively given in advance, so that one could just apply it to the particular [in the way that a concept is applied in a cognitive judgement]' (Adorno 1961: 6552). This can only take place via engagement with the specificity of art.

Adorno's approach to this is echoed by Stanley Cavell (on this see also Bowie 2013: ch. 6). The question is what kind of 'logic' is at issue here. Cavell, who rejects the idea that logic only applies to cognitive judgements, sees a necessity in aesthetic judgements, which is

> partly, a matter of the *ways* a judgement is supported, the ways in which conviction in it is produced: it is only by virtue of these recurrent patterns of support that a remark will count as––will be––aesthetic, or a mere matter of taste, or moral, propagandistic, religious, magical, scientific, philosophical.
>
> (Cavell 1976: 93)

Rather than there being clearly delineated sectors with their own theories, like philosophy, natural science, etc., which can 'put the brake on' thinking, the

idea is that human practices, which change in response to the demands of the world, produce their own necessities that crystallize in areas with shifting boundaries. A pattern of support in this sense could be gesture or dance with respect to understanding music. Adorno talks of music as 'a language sedimented from gestures' (Adorno 1997: vol. xviii, p. 154), such that its demands will elicit their own procedures, which can be more or less successful. If a conductor finds one gesture does not get the effect demanded in a piece, they will try others to get it right: this will only work within an established context of norms and tensions between norms that constitutes a musical tradition. Only in a world where—for example in extreme versions of logical positivism—the only expression of true and false which is permissible is observation statements or statements of logic does such a view fail to make sense.

The borderline between art and philosophy is, then, open to constant renegotiation, and Adorno does not seek to dissolve one into the other, but insists on the ongoing tensions between the two. The very fact that, although 'art', in some sense, has been talked about in philosophy at least since Plato, a specific sector of philosophy termed aesthetics only emerges in the eighteenth century suggests what this implies. The key point of focus here is again the shift in humankind's relations to nature to which the division of labour in philosophy is a response, rather than the truth claims of the various versions of aesthetics that emerge. The tendency in the analytic tradition to relegate aesthetic issues to a peripheral status is in this view itself a historical symptom that has to be interpreted. Adorno sees the issues here in terms of 'experience':

> Just as the interpretation of philosophical tradition has to dig for the experiences which motivate the categorial apparatus and the deductive links in the first place, interpretation of works of art presses towards this core of experience which is subjectively experienced and leaves the subject beneath itself; in this way it conforms to the convergence of philosophy and art in truth content. (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 422)

Like Cavell, Adorno insists that art and aesthetics are inseparable from particular subjective experience, but that this does not exclude them from objectivity. There is no ready-made series of theoretical premises that can be used to characterize experience and its relationship to objectivity: this has to be sought via the interpretation of specific manifestations of art and philosophy.

Adorno sees the contemporary situation as having emerged via a historical split: 'The great philosophical aesthetics were concordant with art to the extent that they conceptualized what was evidently universal in it; in

accordance with a stage of mind [*Geist*] in which philosophy and others of its forms, like art, were not yet torn apart' (pp. 495–6). Given the loss of universal assumptions about art manifest in the disintegration of any binding conceptions of form, attempting to re-establish universals can result in philosophy that is 'pumped into art' (p. 507). Philosophy can just impose a pre-existing frame onto something that, in the modern period, is often characterized precisely by its resistance to received forms.

## Art, Communication, and Society

Adorno thinks that art relies on a dialectic of particularity and universality: the more it takes on this dialectic, the more likely it is to achieve universality through intense immersion in particularity. In his terms, Beckett, Proust, Kafka, the Second Viennese School, and others establish canons of aesthetic significance by attending to the finest details of artistic construction and expression, and to aspects of the world which escape dominant forms of attention. The most technically advanced art opposes the levelling effects of the culture industry, and Adorno is critical of art that fails to live up to the 'state of the material' of its period. The Western musical tradition from Bach, via Beethoven, to Boulez can be read as a series of developments of what the preceding forms of composition lacked with respect to the emancipation of expression associated with the rise of modern individualism. In certain respects this particular parallel of music and philosophy is compelling, and music can be inferior if it fails to respond to new demands created by groundbreaking works.

Something analogous is present in other kinds of music, but here the limitations of Adorno's perspective can become apparent. Most committed jazz musicians feel the need to keep developing the harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic dimensions of their playing to avoid sounding clichéd.[5] Forms of expression that become routine cease to have expressive power, and often sound inauthentic. The moves from New Orleans polyphony in the 1920s to a version of free atonality in the late 1950s in some respects echo the European tradition. In some contexts, however, musicians can adopt a style from the history of jazz and seek to realize further improvisational and other possibilities offered by such a style, rather than move from it to what developed out of it historically. They can do this in the name of carrying on a tradition which

[5] See Bowie 2020 for an evaluation of Adorno's own view of jazz, which is not the central issue here.

threatens to be forgotten in a specific social context. The revival of such music can, for example, offer a counter to racial injustice in the past that still affects the present, in line with Adorno's concern with art as a form of response to oppression.

A further example which complicates the idea of the 'state of the material' is the fact that the music which comes after free jazz does not necessarily seek to carry on in the same vein: free jazz can become as clichéd as tonal jazz. Instead, elements of free jazz are incorporated into music that is largely still tonal, as a way of extending melodic possibilities, without abandoning constraints that sustain musical tension. In understanding such cases of discontinuous change, local contexts become crucial. This militates against the global view which Adorno adopts for his assessment of the truth content of advanced music, and questions exactly how philosophical responses to modernity relate to aesthetic ones. While modernity is in some respects a history of accumulating disaster, at the same time it opens up diverse resources for freedom and the improvement of life, which may only occur in local contexts.

Few people today would be at ease in specifying what the 'state of the material' is in music (or other arts), even though failure to respond to the challenge posed by the best art remains a key factor in aesthetic criticism and production. New music that continues the tradition of European modernism is no longer central to contemporary culture, even if excellent new music is still being produced. Concert halls and opera houses generally live more from keeping the music of the past alive in new interpretations than from groundbreaking new works. The decentred cultural production of the present is no doubt in significant measure influenced by the culture industry's commodification of art, and the role of social class in determining which culture is appreciated by whom remains central. However, to regard the relative decline in the status of certain kinds of cultural production as merely a further instance of the context of delusion is inadequate to the issues raised by thinking about philosophy's relationship to art and aesthetics.

I have elsewhere (Bowie 2007: ch. 9; 2013: ch. 6) suggested that Adorno's response to the relationship between art and philosophy tends to privilege what might be termed 'philosophical music' over 'musical philosophy'. The former involves focus on music—essentially the European tradition from Bach to the avant-garde—which echoes the philosophical narrative summed up by the dialectic of enlightenment involved in technological development, and by Adorno's demand that artworks should involve 'mimesis of domination' and 'become like dominating behaviour, in order to produce something

that is qualitatively different from the world of domination' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 430). As Habermas, Wellmer, and others have pointed out, this demand depends on the notion of the subject dominating the object as the decisive paradigm of what leads to the ills of modernity. However, plausible as it is in some respects, this idea can effectively become a metaphysical presupposition, leaving too little space for what may offer ways out of such domination. We have seen that there are significant reasons for connecting art and language, and that this affects how we think about art and philosophy. If one rejects the Nietzsche-derived assimilation of language and communication to the exercise of power, which is present in certain aspects of Adorno's thinking, then communication has to be thought of in wider terms. While indeed being a means of exercising power over the world and other subjects, language can also be a medium of self-reflection and self-criticism, and can, as art does, open the subject to the world and other people in new ways.

The notion of 'musical philosophy' seeks to avoid the objectification of music that is a danger when it is tied too closely to a philosophical narrative in the manner of Adorno's assessment of the Second Viennese School and other forms of modernism. When Adorno writes about Beethoven or Mahler, he gives more weight to the expansion of expressive possibilities, which point to a different model of how subjectivity can be conceived, beyond it being a locus of domination. Wellmer sees the problem in Adorno as lying in a 'one-sided interpretation of the "negativity" he attributes to the "shattered unity" of the modern work of art' by seeing 'above all in the great works of art a faithful mirror of increasing disintegration of meaning and of the subject in reality' (Wellmer 1985: 29). In contrast, Wellmer contends that

> the 'path of increasing negativity' of art also involves the other moment: in the 'negation of objectively binding meaning' the growing capacity for aesthetic *processing* of what, precisely by dint of its becoming language in the work of art, is no longer merely negated, i.e. excluded from the realm of symbolic communication. (Wellmer 1985: 29)

Musical philosophy, which can include music itself, seeks to expand the realm of symbolic communication, so as to give expression to what is occluded by existing forms of sense-making. Wellmer's characterization of how resistance to oppression 'becomes language' in art is particularly apt to jazz in relation to racial oppression in the USA.

Wellmer argues that one has to 'grant to art a *function in connection with* forms of non-aesthetic communication, or with a real change of relationships

between self and world' (1985: 29). Rather than, as too often for Adorno, art being the 'presence in the forms of semblance [*scheinhaft*] of a state which does not yet exist', it involves the possibility of what Hans-Robert Jauss terms the 'change from aesthetic experience to symbolic or communicative action' (Wellmer 1985: 29). Wellmer sums up the key point:

> Works of art which point to broadening the boundaries of communication in terms of their *effect*, not of their *being*, fulfil their enlightening, their cognitive function precisely not on the level of philosophical *knowledge*, but on the level of relations to self and to values, where they intervene in a complex context of attitudes, feelings, interpretations and evaluations.
>
> (Wellmer 1985: 30)

This kind of cognition is not based on the 'inadequacy of the concept' (which can be seen as deriving from the issues of concepts and identity we have explored), but on the fact that it 'includes cognitive, affective and moral-practical aspects in equal measure' (Wellmer 1985: 30), and consists in the capacity to 'speak, to judge, to feel, or to perceive', rather than in propositional knowledge. Echoing an idea we have already encountered, Wellmer talks of art's relationship to the world such that its 'rightness' is not 'recognized in the sense of a propositional truth but like the knowing or recognition of a face' (p. 34). What is in play here is, moreover, not just recognition, but a potential to change how we encounter the world, occasioned by aesthetic experience. We can come to see a face in ways which previously were not available to us. If the sense we make of the world is to be adequately reflected upon, this cannot just be in terms of knowledge, but has to involve forms of understanding that can only come about through participation in art, which enhances and extends symbolic and communicative capacities that theoretical knowledge cannot encompass.

Adorno's concern for 'aesthetic autonomy'—the liberation of art from religious and instrumental social purposes—which derives from his analysis of how modern culture is debased by the market, makes him, as we saw, suspicious of the idea that art and aesthetic experience can intervene in social and political affairs: 'Indeed [art's] autonomy remains irrevocable. All attempts to give back to art what it doubts by giving it a social function […] have failed' (Adorno 1997: vol. vii, p. 9). As such, only art that refuses such a function can avoid bolstering the given state of society by enabling people to accommodate themselves to what they should be resisting. This stance involves a gnostic sense of the modern world as irredeemably negative, which leads to the claims

that art should refuse to communicate in the terms of that world. Such a stance with respect to how sense can be made in the modern world is, though, as Wellmer shows, too restrictive, even though it offers important insights into the nature of modernist art and the functioning of the culture industry. Adorno's stance here is also sometimes of little use when considering non-Western forms of art.

It is implausible to downplay the fact that the everyday production and reception of art, of however varying standards, often benefits modern societies. By seeking to see art's significance predominantly in terms of a philosophical understanding of the broader roots of the ills of modernity, Adorno sometimes obscures this fact. Societies with restricted resources for widening the scope of communication and expression are impoverished more than just with respect to the pleasure art may bring. The refusal of authoritarian governments to give state support to, or readiness to proscribe, innovative art can suggest how. Adorno underestimates the ways in which, despite the influence of the culture industry, many forms of art may remain an everyday resource for sense-making that does not fall prey to his stringent philosophical verdict.

The move away from religious and other functions that enables autonomy in art does not necessarily mean that art cannot take the place of at least some aspects of religious practice. As we have seen, there is a link between participation in ritual and participation in art, where the sense made is inseparable from the practice, even though theological content may be absent in the latter. Attending concerts or theatre performances, playing in a band or acting in a local theatre group, and many other collective aesthetic activities, orient lives and add to their meaning. Although there can be an ideological aspect to such activities, they can also be a resource for combatting ideology. Collective activities always involve the danger of the conformism that is Adorno's justified target in much of his writing about art, but they can also constitute forms of resistance to conformism, as jazz and other black music proved during the Civil Rights Movement in the USA. The very fact that, as Adorno himself recognizes, these activities involve a drive to get it right in ways which cannot be wholly bound by rules is an essential element in developing critical awareness of limitations, but also of new potential. His suspicion of art that seeks to function as political propaganda leaves too little room for appreciating how, as Wellmer shows, by expanding communicative possibilities, even art that does not employ the most advanced techniques, and is distorted by the effects of the market, may contribute to social and political enhancement.

*AT* was to have this fragment by Friedrich Schlegel as its motto: 'In what one calls philosophy of art, one of the two is usually missing; either

philosophy or art.' Despite the limitations we have seen, Adorno highlights art's philosophical importance in ways that take account of its socioeconomic and political contexts that are still too rare in many areas of philosophy. Rather than seeing the questions art poses for philosophy just in terms of philosophy's seeking to answer such questions, he establishes a shifting two-way relationship between them, such that art may be a better response to some philosophical issues than philosophy itself. In the Conclusion I will further explore this relationship.

# Conclusion

Unlike in some areas of natural science, there is a notable lack of consensus in philosophy on its most central topics. Those doing scientific research readily acknowledge the provisionality of what they find out, but they do so within frames where much is regarded as well-established, as otherwise the basis of new discovery and self-correction would be lacking. The same cannot be said of philosophy. This alone is sufficient reason to question the often quite exclusive concentration on advancing arguments in relation to specialized topics that still dominates some areas of professional philosophy. The concern with the uses and dangers of rhetoric from Greek philosophy onwards can suggest why: argument in real human contexts always involves much more than propositional content. Indeed, in some contexts, 'winning the argument' may sometimes be as likely to make things worse as it is to make them better.[1] Saying this is not to argue against argument, which would be absurd, rather it is intended to suggest that philosophy often risks neglecting the kinds of sense-making this book has explored. A key assumption here has been that it is precisely changes in and resistance to interpretation that can be vital to art. Although some art may, so to speak, be 'refuted', because it no longer 'says' anything (cf. Adorno on the novel of adultery in the last chapter), really significant art, while perhaps involving 'refutations' of previous interpretations, is marked by its ability to sustain enduring attention.[2] Hume already recognized this, as we saw, and he contrasted it with the situation in philosophy, though he does not see how philosophers may return to the centre of attention as history changes, in a manner not unrelated to what can happen in the history of art.

In the light of the issue of shifting interpretations, investigating philosophy's relationship to art becomes more complex. The reception history of key figures like Plato, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein cannot be understood

[1] As a friend of mine once said in relation to their partner: 'We're going to relationship counselling, and I'm going to win.'

[2] Gadamer's claim that we only ever understand differently and do not understand better makes a lot of sense with respect to the history of the reception of works of art, but the normativity inherent in interpretation does demand that we sometimes simply claim that an interpretation of a work is false.

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just in terms of their 'argument*s*'. It depends instead on interpretations and historical developments which kept their texts alive as means of engaging with the world. Adorno asserts: 'The history of philosophy is not just a history of problems and solutions, but in part also a rhythm of remembering and forgetting' (1959–60: 4988). Something similar can be said with respect to art. In both cases, what counts is how a historical or social situation comes to be illuminated by works from the past in ways which cannot be predicted, or brought about solely by argument: Walter Benjamin talks about this in terms of works becoming 'readable'. Adorno's own work receded from view in the Anglophone world to some extent towards the end of the last century, but has returned with a vengeance since the economic crash of 2007 and the realization of the seriousness of the climate crisis. So how should we think about the contemporary relationship between philosophy and art, and reflection on art, in the light of the preceding chapters?

Adorno asserts in *Negative Dialectics*, 'it cannot be the task of a philosophical interpretation of works of art to produce their identity with the concept, to consume the former in the latter' (Adorno 1997: vol. vi, p. 23). Hegel relied on such an identity in his ideas about the end of art, but even in his case, the question was more complex. The issue can, moreover, be seen the other way round, in terms of 'aesthetic' interpretations of philosophy, which is in certain respects what the present book has involved. Rather than concentrate on arguments confirming or refuting scepticism I have located it in a series of contexts and tried to configure those contexts so that they can shed light on each other. This is one reason why I have not opted for or against arguments in the analytical philosophical literature on scepticism. The use of the term 'aesthetic' here does not entail something being a work of art or beautiful, but instead refers to the forms philosophy may take, which can affect how it brings things to light. The 'problem of scepticism' starts to appear differently in varying contexts, as we already saw in Montaigne, and it is affected by the form in which it appears: attention to textuality, rather than the extraction of arguments, is crucial here. Specific argumentative points I have made may or may not convince, but the change of focus and interaction of differing historical perspectives may change how scepticism is responded to, not least because in real contexts the scope of 'scepticism' cannot necessarily be established by a definition or a theory. The best response to a philosophical issue, as Marx, Dewey, Wittgenstein, Adorno, and others suggest, is not always an argument or a theory. Theories, especially in philosophy, are not always refuted by argument, and are often undermined by the pressure of experience or historical change. Moreover, some of their content often subsequently

returns in another form when something forgotten or repressed manifests itself again.

The success of modern science would seem to be the kind of world-changing factor that would put paid to modern scepticism's epistemological variant, but, as we have seen, precisely the opposite happens. In the contexts I have tried to establish, philosophy can be a symptom of issues which may not be apparent in the actual claims made within philosophy itself. This kind of contextualization contrasts with analytical modes of thinking, where the aim is to get at the core of an issue by isolating it from extraneous factors. Clearly philosophy needs both approaches, but it is important to ponder why, especially in the Anglophone world, an analytical approach has sometimes been seen as almost the only way to do philosophy, with little meta-reflection on the consequences and effects of highly specialized philosophical arguments about matters that can affect everyone.

Philosophy is, as it was from its beginnings, also a practice of life, rather than just a theoretical discipline with a specifiable aim. The idea that philosophy should mimic the natural sciences if it is to succeed as a discipline can ignore how theories affect the world. The scientific theories at the foundations of the modern world are mainly valued because of the results of their predicting events, not because the theories attain a final standard of proof. The same cannot be said of philosophical theories, which largely do not involve the same conditions of employment and evaluation, being instead part of an ongoing conversation in which some voices may become dominant for a time, and then may recede, without there necessarily being clear reasons why. The massive fluctuations in the reception of Hegel in the Anglophone world can suggest the issue here.

When, in the 'philosophy of art', the subject matter itself only makes sense because of its connections to ourselves and how we inhabit the world, the attempt to circumscribe a philosophical agenda for the investigation of art leads to the narrowness of focus characteristic of some (though not all) of its analytical manifestations. Dewey warned about the causes of this in *Art and Experience*:

> My purpose [. . .] is to indicate that *theories* which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing, are not inherent in the subject-matter but arise because of specifiable extraneous conditions. Embedded as they are in institutions and in habits of life, these conditions operate effectively because they work so unconsciously. Then the theorist assumes they are embedded in the

> nature of things. Nevertheless, the influence of these conditions is not confined to theory. As I have already indicated, it deeply affects the practice of living, driving away esthetic perceptions that are necessary ingredients of happiness, or reducing them to the level of compensating transient pleasurable excitations. (Dewey 1980: 10)

In Dewey's approach, aesthetic autonomy is still respected, but not as the most essential aspect of philosophical understanding of art. The vital aspect for Dewey is: 'How is it that the everyday making of things grows into that form of making which is genuinely artistic? How is it that our everyday enjoyment of scenes and situations develops into the peculiar satisfaction that attends the experience which is emphatically esthetic?' (p. 12). His answer has to do with the capacity for creating form at all levels, which he sees, echoing themes from early German Romanticism, in terms of rhythm:

> All interactions that effect stability and order in the whirling flux of change are rhythms. There is ebb and flow, systole and diastole; ordered change. The latter moves within bounds. To overpass the limits that are set is destruction and death, out of which, however, new rhythms are built up. (Dewey 1980: 16)

Dreyfus and Taylor see Platonic form in similar terms: 'we can think of the Form as a kind of rhythm giving shape to both objects and intellect' (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 18).

The kind of stance towards the world which leads to epistemological scepticism recedes for Dewey in favour of attention to what emerges from the need to engender order required for survival, which is common to humans and the rest of living nature: 'Because the actual world, that in which we live, is a combination of movement and culmination, of breaks and re-unions, the experience of a living creature is capable of esthetic quality' (Dewey 1980: 17). This changes the frame of philosophical questioning, expanding it to all the ways in which relations to the world are constituted, many of which are not touched by questions of epistemological doubt. 'Experience' for Dewey 'signifies active and alert commerce with the world; at its height it signifies complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events' (p. 19). The concern, then, is again with relationships to the world which are prior to whatever may become an object of argument, including argument about the possibility of knowledge. We saw versions of what is at issue here in Cassirer and Heidegger. The vital factor is how to keep alive an openness to changes

that arise from 'commerce with the world' without this being a recipe for randomness and indeterminacy.

'Commerce with the world' can, of course, lead in both progressive and reactionary directions. The use of aesthetic modes of engaging people is a feature of authoritarian and fascist politics. Nationalism is almost invariably predicated on some kind of mythology, often linked to a particular vision of the natural world. At the same time, without the kind of engagement Dewey highlights, the sense that motivates people and gives lives meaning is impoverished. As we saw, Adorno can underplay the enhancements made possible through aesthetic communication, in the light of the dangers it can entail. Dewey, in contrast, sometimes underestimates the dark side of 'experience' that is evident again in the recent revival of nationalist mythologies which are fuelling new forms of fascism. Philosophical engagement with these issues has, then, to include the tension between these two aspects.

Without the dangers suggested here, art would, of course, cease to be as significant as it is. The 'Oldest System-Programme of German Idealism', written by either Hegel, Hölderlin, or Schelling in 1796–7 (see Bowie 2003), already connected modern philosophy's relationship to social and political communication, and action to aesthetics. The System-Programme's response was to call for a 'mythology of *reason*', as a means of communicating progressive aims to society as a whole. The text highlights both the dangers of and the necessity for 'mythology', the communication of ideas in a form which speaks to the senses, the emotions, and the imagination, as much as to the intellect:

> we must have a new mythology, but this mythology must be in the service of the Ideas, it must become a mythology of *reason*. Before we make the Ideas aesthetic i.e. mythological, they are of no interest to the *people* and on the other hand before mythology is reasonable the philosopher must be ashamed of it. (cited in Bowie 2003 p. 335)

In an analogous vein, Dewey maintains that 'esthetic cannot be sharply marked off from intellectual experience since the latter must bear an esthetic stamp to be itself complete' (1980 p. 38). To show this, he distinguishes between 'recognition', apprehension of the world which is 'satisfied when a proper tag or label is attached, "proper" signifying one that serves a purpose outside the act of recognition' (p. 53), which relates to the concerns about identity and instrumental reason we have examined, and 'perception', where 'There is [. . .] no such thing in perception as seeing or hearing *plus* emotion.

The perceived object or scene is emotionally pervaded throughout.' Only where apprehension involves going beyond identification, so that there is 'an act of extraction of what is significant' (p. 54) which is not just dependent on convention, is there 'experience'. In the 'esthetic' in Dewey's sense the 'practical, emotional, and intellectual' are 'linked to one another, and do not merely succeed one another' (p. 55). This can be the case in differing kinds of experience, though it is less prevalent in predominantly cognitive and practical experiences.

Dewey's focus on the sources from which the 'attitudes of the self are informed with meaning' (p. 59) connects developed symbolic forms, like cognition, to the origin of the meaningfulness that has been a constant theme in this book. The world which confronts us objectively, because it generates the need for means of survival, is responded to by 'impulsion', which

> starts an experience that does not know where it is going; resistance and check bring about the conversion of direct forward action into re-flection; what is turned back upon is the relation of hindering conditions to what the self possesses as working capital in virtue of prior experience. As the energies thus involved reinforce the original impulsion, this operates more circumspectly with insight into end and method. Such is the outline of every experience that is clothed with meaning. (Dewey 1980: 60)

This portrayal of a dialectic of subject and object—which at times echoes Fichte, who was a major influence on Novalis and Schlegel—again excludes any sense of global scepticism, and it involves both cognitive and aesthetic responses. The attempt to objectify comprehension of emotion must confront the fact that '[s]ave nominally, there is no such thing as *the* emotion of fear, hate, love. The unique, unduplicated character of experienced events and situations impregnates the emotion that is evoked' (Dewey 1980: 67). It is not that, as a sceptical attitude might have it, words fail to grasp these things, precisely because there is no 'thing' as such to grasp. Emotions, like moods for Heidegger, are part of the meaning of the world, and make no sense without the world of which they form a part. For Dewey, this realization is essential to understanding art, which fuses the subjective with that in the object world to which it is a response. Think of how one responds to the tone of Coltrane's saxophone, or a complex dissonant chord like the one which occurs at the crisis of the third movement of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony. Using a 'garden variety' emotional term for such responses does not capture their specific phenomenology, which adds to the way the world can be

experienced and is inseparable from the phenomenon in the world to which the emotion is a response.

An aesthetic expression or articulation of emotions can therefore add more to our understanding than a psychological attempt to classify them, and can extend the range of our comprehension in ways which a method that needs to start with an identifiable phenomenon may not. What Proust's *À la recherche* 'says' about 'jealousy' consists in the minute details of situations and their relations to other situations, out of which a picture is built that no definition can capture. This is not just about learning more about the use of a word: the way the notion becomes manifest in the novel changes the very meaning of what is at issue (as we saw 'love' also does in Proust, the two being predicated on each other). Exploration of the world through art opens up space which is not fully accessible to an objectifying account. Forms of expression like music need not (as they often are by philosophers) be seen as a mystery to be explained:

> If all meanings could be adequately expressed by words, the arts of painting and music would not exist. There are values and meanings that can be expressed only by immediately visible and auditory qualities, and to ask what they mean in the sense of something that can be put into words is to deny their distinctive existence. (Dewey 1980: 74)

As such, 'The oppositions of individual and universal, of subjective and objective, of freedom and order, in which philosophers have reveled, have no place in the work of art' (p. 82). Dewey's view is significant not least, as he made clear in so much of his work, because it can inform policy with respect to education and other domains of public life. Many of these are too often dealt with in an objectifying technocratic manner that can exclude perspectives whose first demand is for the expansion of meaning and motivation, and the awareness of new forms of value. The contemporary, now ubiquitous threats to the study of the humanities are a sign of what Dewey was opposing.

Modernity is, as we have seen, inseparably connected to the scientific revolution and the growth of reliable cognition, but can also be tracked in terms of the new significance of natural beauty. This significance is not a 'subjective' phenomenon, because it emerges in different places at much the same time during the eighteenth century, and actually changes how and what the world *is*. The latter claim can only be denied if one maintains that 'reality' is only what the physical sciences reveal, the position we questioned in terms of the notion of 'world'. The very fact that such a claim can so dominate

philosophical debate, and has effects in many domains of social, political, and cultural life, is itself a symptom of what this book has sought to question. As is often pointed out, this claim itself is not a natural scientific claim and so involves metaphysical commitments outside its own scope, as well has having social and political effects by obscuring the kind of truth that is only accessible through art.

Both Heidegger and Dewey claim that sense is essentially made through what we do. Any such claim can, of course, be questioned as to its truth. However, focusing primarily on that perspective threatens to obscure the ways in which transformations of sense that result from changing human practices, and forms of articulation and expression, cannot be grasped just in terms of propositions that can be assented to or denied. The real content of ritual practices is, as we have seen, not articulated by their description. What becomes manifest via the development of the novel or of music cannot be fully cashed out into a series of claims whose sense can be grasped independently of the specific forms of expression of the novel or of the music in question. In a philosophical climate where scientism is rife, such issues should be more central to philosophical reflection than they have tended to be. Moreover, the kind of sense at issue here is in vital respects inimical to what is sometimes seen as being constitutive of philosophy.

One key to aesthetic sense in modernity can be encapsulated, as we have repeatedly seen, by Thelonious Monk's remark 'Wrong is right', which is central to modernist forms of art, from Baudelaire's use of objects of revulsion in *Les Fleurs du mal* to Duchamp's ready-mades. The kind of philosophy which sees aesthetics as a sub-area that is subordinate to the real metaphysical and epistemological questions focuses on questions about, for example, whether a thing is beautiful because we like it, or whether we like it because it is beautiful. The fact is, however, that there is no obvious answer to such questions. Art is often most significant when what was regarded as either outside art altogether or as involving an aesthetic failure becomes the basis of new art: this precludes any simple attribution of 'beauty' as a property of the object or a response of the subject.

When what previously made no sense comes to make sense, the result can retrospectively change the nature of previous modes of sense-making. Something analogous might be said to happen in the cognitive realm, when a new discovery changes how we determine what a whole range of things are. However, what happens in scientific cognition is accompanied in philosophy by concern about the reliability of our contact with the world. In the aesthetic sphere, anxiety with respect to relations to the world evidently also

occurs—indeed, it is central to many strands of modernism. However, it is manifested in new, non-cognitive forms that can at the same time generate new kinds of meaningfulness, which can connect people with the world in other ways.

The ambivalent status of philosophical reflection on aesthetic issues in the modern period is often viewed as resulting from a failure to elevate such theorizing to the level supposedly achieved by metaphysics, epistemology, and the like. The threat of arbitrariness in 'judgements of taste', and the difficulty of articulating forms of intelligibility which do not rely on concepts, have been seen as reasons for the relegation of aesthetics to its lowly status, especially in Anglophone analytical philosophy. I have proposed a radical alternative: precisely because aesthetic issues do not fit easily into the forms which modern philosophy often employs, they can reveal contradictions and deficits in those forms, particularly with respect to the scope and nature of 'meaning'.

Heidegger questioned whether Newton's laws were true before Newton proposed them. The reason Heidegger raised the question is that the world prior to Newton promulgating his laws was understood and inhabited without these laws playing a manifest role in how the world was intelligible, even though they were already 'in force'. In contrast, the affective and other connections to nature that emerge in a work like Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony or Wordsworth's poetry are of a different order and make a different kind of sense to that made by previous relations to nature. These relations change again in Mahler's evocations of nature, which involve a new unease at how modern humankind relates to the natural world, let alone in the images of nature in various forms of Expressionist music and painting. This kind of new sense was not 'already there', nor can one say it is just subjective projection. The 'projection' would have no force if it did not affect what the world *is*. This cannot be said just to be 'subjective': the difference between subjective and objective is, as Cassirer shows, part of the historically changing context of significance itself. Once it is 'there', new sense can become the object of statements which may lay claims to truth, but the prior question is how we understand its emergence, and how this relates to the perceived tasks of philosophy.

We have seen how nature in modernity becomes a locus of interrogation of how we conceive of 'meaning'. In this respect it is nature's becoming something which is seen as fully explicable by 'mathematization' and experiment that has to be understood, and this cannot be done in terms derived from mathematization and experiment themselves. Such an approach also offers a further counter to scientism. Scientism relies on privileging the timeless

conception of nature over all others, but this conception is itself a historical product which reflects how nature becomes manifest in modernity. This issue can only adequately be approached, as this book has tried to do, by taking into account historical changes in the relationship between the 'subjective' and the 'objective', rather than assuming the task is to conclusively establish their conceptual status.

The philosophical story of responses to scepticism from the early modern period onwards needs to take more heed of anthropological and other explorations of how cultures manifest their relations to the world beyond their attempts to know the world objectively. These attempts can themselves, as Weber's disenchantment suggests, be seen as increasing the sense of dislocation from the world that accompanies secularization. Making sense of things by objectifying them can lead to a destruction of other kinds of sense, and thus to the development of new kinds of sense that seek to compensate for that destruction. When mythological stories no longer function as foundational means of understanding one's location in the world, other forms of story emerge which may question the very enterprise of seeking foundations, in the name of opening up future possibilities. This is what makes the early German Romantics so important in the perspective I have tried to develop.

In many circumstances, seeing art as a kind of philosophy, and philosophy as a kind of art, may do more justice to the history of modern philosophy than views which see philosophy as needing to echo what goes on in the sciences (on this, see Noë 2015). The meanings of the terms 'art' and 'philosophy' should instead be seen as what emerges via tensions between competing ways in which sense is articulated in modernity. There is no such 'thing' as art or philosophy that can be grasped by an adequate definition. They are instead modes of sense-making whose borders shift via the pressures of history, related changes in the ways that value is expressed, embodied, and enacted in social contexts, the availability of technical resources, etc. Natural sciences which aim at law-governed explanations to be used for practical problem-solving and cognitive explanation can be expressed in specific symbolic forms, particularly mathematical ones, that develop systematically in the modern period. The domains of sense that constitute what are thought of as art or philosophy, on the other hand, have no systematically constituted symbolic forms.

The issues of the book evidently relate to the disintegration of shared religious frameworks for interpreting the world in modernity. There have always been interpretative conflicts within and between religions. What differentiates the modern situation is that conflicts over doctrine can no longer presuppose

any fundamentally shared framework based on founding texts or myths. In this respect, lack of consensus over aesthetic judgements, and responses to issues raised by this lack of consensus, can be seen as the prelude to a ubiquitous lack of such consensus. From many philosophical perspectives this might seem like a recipe for 'anything goes', which needs to be countered by yet more, and better, philosophical work to ground deficient epistemological frameworks. It is, however, implausible to claim that either aesthetic or cognitive judgements are merely arbitrary, or just the effects of power relations. And rather than the history of epistemology being seen as just the failure it can seem to be in foundational terms, it can instead be seen as an expression of tensions in the ways in which humankind inhabits the world. That history is therefore revealing in ways that are analogous to how art is revealing.

The claims to rigour made by some analytical philosophers against more hermeneutic approaches too rarely reflect the fact that rigour in argument is not the sole criterion of significant philosophy. Such rigour can obviously be vital within specific domains of argument, but what the aesthetic dimensions can help to show is how such domains are not themselves initially constituted with the internal rigour which they may acquire once they are constituted. Merleau-Ponty talks in this sense of the prior 'facticity of the world' before philosophical reflection (Merleau-Ponty 1945: xii). Understanding aesthetic issues demands its own kind of rigour, of the kind Cavell describes, that can be lacking in the decontextualized reflections on conceptual problems that are characteristic of certain kinds of analytical philosophy.

What I have tried to show is largely metaphilosophical, seeking to reframe some key philosophical concerns, rather than intervene in specific arguments within a domain. Aesthetic considerations can change the scope of what is manifest within a domain, especially one like ethics: as Rorty and others argue, literature may here offer more insight than many philosophical theories. It can do so because it need not seek to exclude the ambiguity characteristic of many complex real-world ethical situations, where there are competing imperatives, in order to advance a particular ethical stance. The very idea of a 'theory of ethics' may look questionable when confronted with historical accounts of what actually motivated and constrained human action and behaviour, as we saw in Chapter 5. Such accounts can take the form of a novel, such as *L'Éducation sentimentale*, where the ambivalent nature of ethics during a revolution is reflected in the nature of Flaubert's prose. Merleau-Ponty's distinction between what the physical sciences seek and what philosophy seeks points to a tension that some contemporary philosophy still neglects:

> In every civilization it is a matter of finding the Idea in the Hegelian sense, that is to say, not a law of the physico-mathematical kind, accessible to objective thought, but the formula of a unique behaviour with respect to other people, to Nature, to time and death, a certain manner of giving form to the world which the historian must be able to take up and assume.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty 1945: xiii)

'Giving form to the world' obviously involves cognitive and ethical ordering, but it has to include all the ways in which order is given, hence art's role as a vital part of this.

For Merleau-Ponty, our relations to the world do not essentially involve sceptical doubt: 'we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning [*sens*]' (1945: xiv), and 'philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the realization of a truth' (p. xv). Elsewhere he asserts, 'The function of philosophy would then be to record this movement [*passage*] of sense, rather than take it as a fait accompli' (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 18), which further suggests how philosophy is 'like art'. In both cases the vital factor is that something different emerges:

> The philosopher does not say that a final overcoming of human contradictions is possible and that the total human being awaits us in the future: like everyone he knows nothing about this. He says—and this is something completely different,—that the world begins, that we must not judge its future by what has been its past [. . .] that our relations with nature are not fixed once and for all, that nobody can know what freedom can achieve, nor imagine what human customs and relations would be in a civilization that would no longer be haunted by competition and necessity. (Merleau-Ponty 1960: 467)

What differentiates such a stance from some contemporary forms of philosophy is that it is primarily concerned with what we saw in the early German Romantics, where the genesis of new sense militates against the potential nihilism of 'knowing the final answer'. Though aiming at discursive truth in philosophy is ineluctable, it can in some contexts also obscure resources for sense that may be more important than what can be expressed in theoretical terms. The Romantics' idea of philosophy as an 'endless journey' is reflected in their giving a vital role to art, rather than seeking ever closer assimilation of philosophy to the sciences.

Habermas, who is suspicious of some aspects of what he sees as the Romantic tradition's privileging of world disclosure over scientific and other

problem-solving, still echoes parts of the Romantic rapprochement of art and philosophy when he says:

> Nowadays, philosophy is a—if I may say—parasitic undertaking that lives off learning processes in other spheres. But precisely in the secondary role of a form of reflection that refers to other already existing cultural achievements, philosophy can render what is known and half-known in a society transparent in its interconnections and thus, expose it to critical scrutiny. This is what originally was meant by a critical theory of society.
>
> http://habermas-rawls.blogspot.co.uk/2016/04/transcript-of-habermass-acceptance.html

How such a critical activity is carried out will depend on the nature of the particular social phenomena, and here philosophy and art are again in close proximity.

Meta-reflection on the prevalence of epistemological theorizing in some academic philosophy should consider whether such theorizing is itself also a manifestation of a kind of response to the world which can have very different significances from those that it aims at. An epistemological approach which seeks to arrive at maximum objectivity in relation to nature—to the point of objectifying 'mind' itself, in the manner of reductionist neuroscience—can conspire with other forms of objectification which, as Heidegger contends, turn nature into a 'standing reserve' to be exploited. There is admittedly no meta-frame that can offer firm grounds for how to assess unseen connections between forms of philosophy and historical developments. But that is why the aesthetic aspects I have been concerned to highlight are so important. Because they cross cognitive, ethical, and expressive domains, they retain a potential to challenge any way of seeing the world which seeks to become exclusive.[3]

Habermas looks back at the emergence of Western philosophy and offers an example of how unpredictable factors can change the nature of philosophy, stressing a point we have repeatedly encountered:

> In the encounter with Christianity, philosophy learns to take domains of experience seriously that first have to be disclosed performatively through participation in a practice before they can then be made into an object of investigation. In contrast to the contemplative route of the wise men, the

[3] Richard Bronk (2009) has, for example, shown how mainstream economics can be challenged by resources from Romantic literature that show the complexity of human motivation.

> communicative path to salvation by participating in a ritual practice opens up the historical universe of a world-wide community of believers.[4]

Taking 'domains of experience seriously that first have to be disclosed performatively through participation in a practice' is precisely the dimension that some forms of contemporary philosophy neglect, particularly with respect to art and aesthetics. The reduction of philosophy's tasks to theorizing already constituted objects of investigation in discrete domains, be they art, ethics, language, science, etc., can lose touch with how we understand the world through our forms of engagement with it which span domains and change the nature of those domains. Nature in Kant's 'formal' sense seems a self-evident domain in some kinds of philosophy, but nature can arguably be better understood by the ways in which its status changes; and in the modern period a crucial shift in that status is brought about by aesthetic responses closely connected to philosophy. The history of 'mind' and 'language' reveal similar shifts, which are carried over into many ongoing, radical differences in the philosophy of mind and language. The role of music in enabling forms of expressive sociality that can break down barriers and enable communication which may be blocked by political or psychological factors further underlines the philosophical importance of 'participation in a practice' (see Bowie 2007).

A perhaps surprising consequence of this view of the aesthetic dimensions is that it involves a different kind of 'scepticism'. Rather than globally question whether mind is in touch with world, the aesthetic dimensions highlight the provisional nature of many ways in which the world can be responded to, rather than assuming that cognitive certainty is the essential aim. If interpretation of the world is to be alive to the dangers of rigidity and dogmatism that have played and are again playing a massive social and political role in modern societies, forms of response to the world which sustain their value by keeping space open for new ways of making sense have real philosophical import. This is one of the great lessons of my involvement in jazz as performer and listener: in the history of jazz performance, what seems established repeatedly comes to be put in question by new practices. The aim is therefore not to establish a fixed canon, but to use the canon to ask new questions. In this perspective, the search for an unshakeable foundation for knowledge is contrasted with the fact that many of the most important ways in which sense is made in the modern world incorporate the inherent temporality and fragility of attempts to ground things, in the name of openness to the other and to

[4] http://habermas-rawls.blogspot.co.uk/2016/04/transcript-of-habermass-acceptance.html

the new—which, it should always be stressed, includes discoveries of the modern sciences.

This involves a very different kind of response to the modern sense of disruption and dislocation of which epistemological scepticism is one symptom. The world is instead always open to new responses, with the attendant anxieties, dangers, and possibilities. The aim here is not a Pyrrhonist circumvention of metaphysics by withholding judgement on metaphysical beliefs about the ultimate nature of reality. Rather, it is to attend to resources for meaning which can supersede attempts to answer traditional metaphysical questions, many of which have anyway been answered or superseded by modern science. It does so by revealing meaning in neglected or hidden aspects of the world, and at the extreme, as Adorno shows, by responding to the ways modern societies can destroy possibilities of making sense, or, as the culture industry does, promoting destructive delusions.

The critique of totalizing metaphysics and instrumental reason in Adorno and others was based on the idea that such metaphysics can echo modern systems of exchange and technology in erasing particularity, and thus neglecting or erasing many forms of meaning. Dreyfus and Taylor put it like this, which sums up the nature of the 'great transformation':

> the objectification of the world which [the disengaged, objectifying stance] achieves is also the condition of a certain control over it. As long as we see ourselves in a cosmos which manifests certain moral and spiritual meanings, our attitudes are or ought to be determined by the significances which are inherent in things. But once we come to see the world as mechanism, a domain of efficient causation, but without inherent purpose, then we are free to treat it as a neutral field where our main concern is how to affect our own purposes. Instrumental reason becomes the only appropriate category, and knowledge can be seen as the basis of power.
>
> (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 25)

As the toxic legacy of colonialism, imperialism, and rampant exploitation of nature for much of the world becomes more and more apparent, symbolic forms which accompanied them and which continue to shape a world that is so obviously in crisis demand new forms of critical interrogation. The widespread surprise at and resistance to revelations of the baleful effects of that legacy, evident in the kind of reactionary populism exemplified by Trump, make very clear that many apparently 'normal' forms of apprehension of the world hide as much as they make manifest.

Critical revaluation of social and cultural forms that respond to the repressions on which the contemporary world is founded needs to include a revaluation of the goals of contemporary philosophy. Dreyfus and Taylor talk of 'mediational epistemology' in which, as Descartes claims: 'I have knowledge of things only through [*par l'entremise de*, 'by means of'] [. . .] inner states, which we can call "ideas"'. They term this 'mediational' 'because of the force of the claim which emerges in the crucial phrase "only through." In knowledge I have a kind of contact with outer reality, but I get this only through some inner states' (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 2), so establishing the separation which gives rise to the modern versions of scepticism. They contrast this with 'contact theories', associated with Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, which involve

> a reembedding of thought and knowledge in the bodily and social-cultural contexts in which it takes place. The attempt is to articulate the framework or context within which our explicit depictions of reality make sense, and to show how this is inseparable from our activity as the kind of embodied, social, and cultural beings we are. [. . .] It is the contact of living, active beings, whose life form involves acting in and on a world which also acts on them. (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 18)

They refer to this contact as a rhythm that connects mind and world in ways which are more fundamental than cognition.

The growth of the importance of music (and the development of new approaches to rhythm) in the period in which mediational stances emerge can be seen as one response to the lack implied by those stances:

> The sense has grown that this stance cuts us off from the world, from nature, from society, even from our own emotional nature. We are divided beings needing to be healed. The objective instrumental stance towards nature makes communion with it, or a sense of inclusion in it, impossible. Self-responsibility pushes us back to the first-person singular, makes us give primacy to the monological over the dialogical. (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 25–6)

The consequences of this are now apparent in the realization that the way the world has been framed in terms of objectification is inseparably linked to forms of repression:

> The kind of understanding that ruling groups have of the ruled, that conquerors have of the conquered—most notably in recent centuries in the

> far-flung European empires—has usually been based on a quiet confidence that the terms they need are already in their vocabulary. Much of the 'social science' of the last century is in this sense just another avatar of an ancient human failing. (Dreyfus and Taylor 2015: 125)

The changing of such 'vocabulary' cannot just be at the level of words, but must also be in terms of shared symbolic practices that resist such dominance. The value of practices, from dance, to music, to literary forms, to visual art and film for such resistance suggests why art has real philosophical significance in this context.

Alva Noë suggests: 'art [. . .] is not a phenomenon at all, like digestion or eyesight, that stands in need of explanation. It is itself a mode of investigation, a style of research, into the crucial questions that interest us, e.g., our human nature' (Noë 2015: 215). He sees art and philosophy as follows, where 'writing' is any kind of 'graphical practice', of the kind which enables engagement with the world (such as cave paintings, which may be as old as the first spoken linguistic capacities):

> we think of the relation of the arts and philosophy (second-order practices) to their raw material (first-order activities) as analogous to the relation of writing to speech. Writing is invented by speakers to model how they speak, or to represent language to themselves. The availability of this very image of language serves to change and reorganize the way we speak in the first place. (Noë 2015: 58)

It is this reflective effect of artistic practices which is crucial: they both connect us to the world and offer contestable norms that prevent the practices becoming rigid. Noë, like Adorno, acknowledges the fact that arts involve technologies, ways of organizing our world, but: 'Technology serves ends. Art questions those very ends. Art affords revelation, transformation, reorganization; art puts into question those values, rules, conventions, and assumptions that make the use of technology possible in the first place' (Noë 2015: 97). Whereas epistemology devoted to overcoming scepticism seeks to underpin what, in the main, is practically already known and in effect, the approaches at issue here keep open the space for us to appreciate what we may ignore, repress, fail to value, and neglect.

Adorno suggests how radical a challenge this may involve when he contends in *Minima Moralia* that the received view of objectivity in societies dominated by the commodity principle is in fact subjective, because it is 'the non-controversial side of appearance, its unquestioned received imprint, the

façade put together from classified data', whereas the supposedly subjective 'breaks through the façade, enters into the specific experience of the thing, rejects the conventional judgements of it, and puts the relation to the object in the place of the majority decision of those who do not even look at it' (Adorno 1997: vol. iv, p. 78). This inversion is manifest in participatory engagement with art: 'For whoever has ever seriously subordinated themselves, out of the power of their precise reaction, to the discipline of a work of art, its immanent law of form, the compulsion of its construction, the objection that their experience is just subjective dissolves like a pathetic illusion.' This once again highlights the importance of attention to how 'subjective' and 'objective' are conceived, if one does not work within the frame in which thinking is above all the subject's attempt to represent the truth of the object. Instead of prioritizing one frame, the idea is to be aware of how all our stances towards and forms of engagement with the world can be open to question, which is why art can function as philosophy.

Even the best-warranted cognitive achievements may turn out to be flawed, not just because they may turn out not to be true, but because exclusive focus on them may block more illuminating ways of relating to the world. The widespread exaggeration of claims, especially with regard to the arts, in an otherwise important and productive realm like neuroscience, suggests the problem (see Noë 2009; 2015). In the view I have tried to develop, sceptical questioning is not a metaphysical issue, but an empirical one, whose form will depend on the practices within a particular domain, and on how these relate to other practices and domains. While sustaining a sense of fallibility, this does not put our contact with the world wholly in question. Instead, it involves widening the scope of how we construe making sense of the world to take full account of ourselves as active participants in the world. Much contemporary philosophy offers little in the way of rendering human existence meaningful: the same cannot be said of the arts, and philosophy needs to take more heed of this if it is to flourish in a world where so much is now radically in question.

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